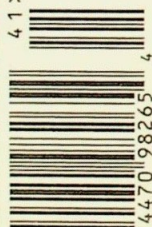


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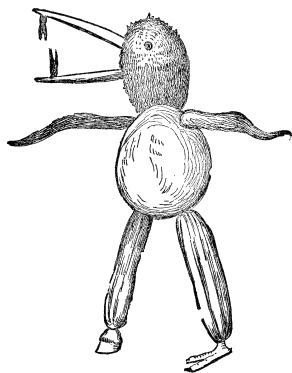
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GEOFFREY NUTTER

Original cover art and design
JEFF HILLIARD & NINA SWIFT

CURTAIN

Georges Godeau

One day I will fall into a sunken road, far from everything. My dog will laugh and then, seeing me asleep, he will lie down to do the same. I don't know when my silence will worry him and what he will do. He is a black and secretive beast.

—translated from the French by Kathleen McGookey

BURNING UP

John Colburn

for Frank Stanford and for Nicaragua

Dawn came and there was something like a great ear
behind the sun.

Ashes drifted down though nothing had burned.
I wanted to shine like a fish.

Supposedly there are people who
will not burn in a fire.
Biblical people.

I carried my bucket.
Dead men pumped water from
the center of the earth.
We all drank it.

More ashes arrived.
We caught them on our tongues,
angels of next time receiving the body.

The earth tumbled then,
the pump handle creaked.

When soldiers came, we ran.
Like always.
I did a snake dance into the culvert.
Soldiers were afraid of ghosts.

A tongue is like a fish worn dull,
shine gone.
Day after day pieces of wood
floated down the river.
What were they building down there, at the end?

They were building a cross.
They were building a bird to fly us out.
They were building a new city
for the dead to lead from
and the soldiers were blind to it.

By noon the ghosts were gone.
The pump handle creaked, but no water.
When the soldiers came back I changed.

I became an angel of next time.
I said the words and
scales fell from my fish tongue
but the giant ear was stone.
Soldiers drifted like ashes.

I told them:

*Downriver, they are building
wings that will not burn in a fire
and you are right to hide.
Put down your guns.*

Soldiers put us in trucks
and took us downriver to become ashes.
The shine stopped.
The giant ear heard everything but
there was no mouth to speak.

In the cage, we counted.
Clouds.
Men.
Hours.
Flies rose from the ash piles.

We counted screams.
A body floated downriver.

Dawn came and men
with no eyes talked
to the giant ear.
Roadside men who
lay dead in a snake dance.

The fireproof bird might rise
tomorrow or never.
All believed in it.
It rained or it would
never rain.

We counted Americans.
Flies performed their math on the dead.
We counted silences.

The sun had one voice
and the river had one voice.
Burnt people dropped from trees.

We slept to the rustling
of boots through weeds
and I remembered the water
of a dead nun's voice.

We were all floating downriver.
Dawn came.
We knew nothing and they shot
half of us, with American guns.

At the sound of it we forgot.
We listened to the river.
Each gunshot carried by water
to dazzle the great ear.

That night I became a snake.
I slipped between the beams.
Crawled among the dead.

I followed the sound of bells.
Downriver.

The soldiers could not count
or didn't care to.
The river counted to one
forever
in its long voice.

Some snakes do not end.
Mythical snakes.
I passed a village.

Downriver there was nothing
except ashes.
The village boiled in silence.
A snake does not scream.

The choices were:
Death.
Torture.
Become a snake.

Forest creatures swam in blood.
My voice was in the past,
covered by the long scar of forgetting.

I know the great ear turned.
That ghosts rose and began their work.
That voices fell from the trees.

I remain in snake form.
I whisper instructions to the great ear
following each little death.

Because now we are ready.
We have so many ashes
for our bird to rise from.

We have a sound to carry us
home, the river's one voice
singing all day to a giant ear.

CODE ORANGE UNDER LOVE, PART I

Brian Blanchfield

Imagine things in sympathy have somewhere touched
or not yet. The episode originary motivates their likeness.
I'll thread anything through this light. Eventual never
by bewailing the eventual—flickering—an impetuous
deathwish gathers footage a length of sentences premature
to say. Wind in ivy and estrus terror qualify, text

translucent. Not yet this morning I was sifting subtext,
apprised by radio all originary night, a night a touch
I fear unfinished, of contingencies' premature
helicopters. Patrolling outside phenomena for likeness,
sleep read a sound trailing off and, impetuous,
returning as essentially the walk my house to yours. Never

now unparallel, trouble covers its own shadow whenever
aboveboard. Lift off and devastate, this is only a test.
I'll thread anything through this light, impetuous
heterogeneity in the sundown beam. We were touched
to have sussed a moment's true content, or the likeness
anyway. Touching disappointment, to bear its imprimatur.

I have a soft spot, and if I may, I take it back, the premature
renunciation. I do want to die in my underwear, in ever
diminishing returns your house to mine. An outward likeness,

that is, different on the way back, motivated by the pretext,
originary news, that all is exercised by terror. It touched
off a spate, a spree, a bulletin dalliance of impetuous

eventualities. Mock emergency rattles the impetuous
alarmists. Worry, if to lead with disregard or, premature,
to follow, is scant advantage. Seattle stands. A touch
aboveboard, trailing off, a pass. The only enzyme never
stuck for words is replicase. It writes the sticky text
it reads. It parts a sympathy and leaves a likeness.

Figure sewn aground, sky broken open, and likeness
bid goodnight. Good morning, fungibility. Impetuous,
I froze a hailstone for you, itself above and below in text-
book agitation. In the other world, if it isn't premature
to speculate, it's called a cave pearl, or not yet. Never,
as it were, yet, we on land wave. Contingent on it, touched

somewhere we on land wave. In bed the Never architects
pull blueprints to their chins. Its patterns premature, impetuous
dream runs by night the house's likeness. It starts at any touch.

MEDITATION IN L

Diane Comer

L is for letter. Not the first nor last letter, but first to come to mind, first at hand, and when signed to the deaf it is itself, L, elle, she. Already we are listening for what will follow, lead on by labials lingering in the mouth like merlot. Life is in our mouth like wine and all the fullness of language, the pure longing to say something, L tells us, L lets us say, L bids us listen. Elegant and eloquent, the belle L, soon we are intimate although we have said nothing but L. Well said, L is a prelude to much of what we want more of, more luck in this life, this love, and it is no accident that M, the letter of much, more, and my follows L, the letter of longing. More merlot, and we begin to loosen the limbs of words and relax into language, to lapse into letters, to look at them with our mouths the way children look at the world. Oral and aural. All the languid, liquid pleasure a single letter will give, if we let it, L will contain.

Hard and stylish K followed by soft L, rolling on into M and N, but stay a little with one letter and it will yield itself, herself, this L. “The light foot hears you and the brightness begins,” Pindar is translated and here is a line L might take for its own. L is the light foot of the alphabet, literally and figuratively. And it is an easy letter to write not like M or W which were a struggle on the wide lines of the Big Chief tablet. A tall line and a short line, half a ladder, half a rectangle, although when I was six I knew the shape but not the word for rectangle, the way I knew the alphabet but not what else these symbols could mean as they rode in a continuous stream of printing and cursive above the blackboard. The letters are cryptic and

potent, like fractions, like the long honey hair of girls named Annette. My own hair stuck out short and boyish, mocking the girl in me, even as girlhood curled and pearled around Annette in the front row. It was hard to believe in the girl when my mother kept my hair pixied and my clothes were ugly, or if not ugly, not pretty. All I wanted in first grade was to have long hair. L is the longing and easiness with which one's heart's desire is possessed by another: the long, tawny perfection of Annette's hair.

I have long hair now. I have had long hair since I was fourteen and I went to have my picture taken for my military ID card and the clerk said, "The girl with the long, blonde hair," pointing to me. It was official: I had long hair at age fourteen. But it was too late. And lateness and longing go hand in hand. Because what we long for we long for in the present, with the single-mindedness of the six-year-old writing rows of lower case L's, one after another marching into infinity, like the number one if it is printed, or an endless loop of longing and lateness if it is cursive. We begin the loop of longing at the bottom, it rises up, turns on itself and descends to the pale blue line of the Big Chief tablet. Sometimes the loop wavers and widens and is ugly, like one's hair. We clutch the fat pencil tighter and try to make the loops obey but the loop, like what we long for, is both easy and unattainable with mere will. I will it. I will do it. I will have it. No longing there, the loop and the long hair already seem to be a fact. The double L at the end of will gives a force and echo to our desire in the future, until L becomes the projection of tongue, line, and sound, the glider of the alphabet floating in a haze of possibility.

Folding their hands together, smooth, clerical hands, without a drop of longing or lust or will within them, the L's are lying to us, but carefully, earnestly. Live and let live, the L's trip along this platitude and lighten it,

give it a gay and easy resolution. The L can be lightweight and fickle, mere filigree, and yet many large and impossible words begin with L—life, love, law, liberty, loyalty, loneliness, longing. Their weight cannot be said, only felt. But words are like lilies, beautiful, rare hybrids or common as the heat and roadside abandonment of the day lily. Like the lilies of the field, the L toils not, neither does it spin—it flourishes. L is the oil of the alphabet, anointing and flavoring words by turn, crude or olive, malevolent or indolent, spilling over or lapsing into syllables until all words are equal beginning, ending, or linked with L. From lullaby to hellhole, L is a mole whose stealthy infiltration of milk and killer proves it has no allegiance. Sly and blushing L, proverbial, adverbial L, able to -ly and lie alike. The alphabet is amoral and sibylline and the L is no exception. But if the aura of L is beloved, beginning or ending or sustaining the names of those we love, then we say these names over and over again, give them to our children, and the letter L becomes a safeguard against all the evil spelling can do.

Easy to write and easy to say, the L is fluid when spoken, trilled in laughter, yelled in anger, the heart in the mouth, calling, “Stella! Stella!” We want the stars and have been shouting up at them for whole lifetimes. L, elle, she, of course L is feminine, for all the masculine appearance of the printed L, all erection and purpose, the cursive L tells the truth. Listen, the loops and flourish seem to say, listen, lean a little closer. The words begin to lick the lobes of our ear, and language, the great seducer, begins to lull us. We are floating on the syllables of L. Common and exotic lilies nod above our head as we slip below the words, stilled in a room with the shutters closed against the splintering sun of midafternoon, where we lie in the cool dimness listening for the heat ticking in the trees and the slow buzz and hum of life.

L doesn't last, although it lingers, the way the golden light lingers in late afternoon, gilding and saturating all the colors. We want to hold on to L,

but even as we say it we release it into the air and dreams around us, hoping that what we let go will return, in an infinite recursive loop, as we keep forming the small and gentle loops of L on the line, believing longing alone will give us what we love in the future, if not the present. Only later, it is too late, and between longing and having is the half-life of desire and the half-life of life herself. Until so much of what we want is like the silent L in half, a vestige of an older spelling, an older way of saying, until we forget what we want, and settle for the silent letters amid the words, half remembering the dream that lulled us to sleep in the heat and silence of the everyday. What lies in the heart of the day lily that we become lost looking into yellow, trying to recall something, something stilled and invisible and palpable—what else, what else is there? And we feel it welling up in our mouth, but cannot say and swallow hard, almost remembering.

RUSTY POEM

Tim Earley

Give me your sandwich, Rusty,
before I thrapple your joy.
You are always here,
with your string of soup cans,
your tired dog, your face.
We do not care to know you, Rusty—
hardy peasant stock is good for some things
but not conversation, Rusty, not Ideas, not Words!
You say things such as, “This cheese is good,”
and, “I used to have a shirt like that,
my sister gave it to me, mine was blue.
I like yours better.”
What is wrong with you, Rusty?
Just because you have the necessary limbs
and comfortably soulful eyes
does not mean you are like us.
We’ve heard the stories.
We know all about the volunteer crossing guard fiasco,
the endless fish burgers,
the florid profusion of azaleas
that showed up in the trunk of your car
one Saturday afternoon for no reason at all.
We’ve seen that look on your face
when you fly a kite, Rusty.
We know you think flying that kite matters.
You think it is a thing to do that people do.

You are silly with a kite, Rusty.
If we ran a race I'd win. You're no cosmologist,
no kind of indefinable poetry incarnate in motion in process
in instant regalia. Look at your jeans.
No one wears jeans like that.
If we stood on our tiptoes your ridiculous bluff
of orange hair would no sooner touch
the sky than mine.
Not everyone wants to stick a tongue in your ear
or a hand down your pants.
Your tired dog is looking real tired, Rusty.
Eat your sandwich and get the fuck out.

THE ORPHEUS HOUSE

Siobhán Scarry

No, there is one small word printed in the center, paper unfolded three times, deep creases for markings on the empty page—read it over and over until there is no translation and it enters the body. Under floorboards we found things left and forgotten. Newspaper clippings, pens run out of ink, a small ceramic plate where stylized ideas of a boy and girl are not playing tennis. The boy is reaching out with flowers and the girl, kneesocks sagging, her racket tucked like a forgotten doll under her arm, stares out from the plate. There are no words on the maps anymore. Someone has pulled out the blue roads into long straight lines and the dots of cities have fallen to the bottom, given the string its weighted swing.

*

We sistered the joists under the kitchen so the floor wouldn't sag or slope, and it's true the inspector didn't have to use the level, the fear of three air bubbles listing in the liquid, pulling past center. Architecture has been practiced and perfected in your dreams, the building of something solid for the mutable world. We will have to adjust to familiar landmarks laughing from off-center. What remains fixed are the windows, the doors, the solid feel of the staircase on the way up.

INDEX OF FIRST LINES FROM AN ANTHOLOGY OF NEW YORK POETS

Ron Padgett and David Shapiro

Aaron had a passion for the lost chord. He looked for it.
A bearded outlaw
A black ear crawls in the window. It is
A bouquet of zephyr-flowers hitched to a hitching post in far off Roanoke
a briar, a blunder, a
a chimney, breathing a little smoke.
a commingling sky
A dog disappears
A dollar for Whitman, you are all stumbling.
A father
A fine thing to burn a hole in your sock
Age came not my conifer, O
Ah Jean Dubuffet
All beauty, resonance, integrity,
"All calligraphy transferred onto cubes
all these numbers, several are possibly aghast,
A man saw a ball of gold in the sky;
a man stands
A mummy
And if I love you, we'll fight.
And nothing was missing
And now the final toast:
An engineer pushes a button in the mountains,

An irregular rattle (shutters) and
An old woman is cutting carnations
An unemployed
A peaceful bite of hamburger and your mind is blown into space,
A prelude sounded in a honkytonk café
aren't
"Are you an eland?" Yes! Yes!
Are you coming or going? The opening
as flames are drawn from the scuttle of turbine's roar,
As for me, when I saw you
A simple weight attached
As I walk down NYC I wonder into the ground
As I was walking home just now, from seeing
A stray deer,
Astronaut Jim Lovell
At 14th Street and First Avenue
At last you are tired of being single
At that instant there came a crash more terrific
At the bonfire
At the kitchen table with Mrs. Hartman
At the little window is the tiny hand
Autumn is very wild through
a white sheet of paper

Back at San Francisco Greyhound, leaning
Behind the black watertower
Bending back with the horror of it,
Be uncovered!
bird is out-to-lunch.
Bob Friede
Bridges that, a little because of absence,
Borges, B. R. Lieut. Second Btn. The Royal Ulster
by a I

Car swerves,
Caruso: a voice.
Cats climb trees because they are
chocolate, pained, vated, hysterical, box
Coming down the sluice of morning, Billy the Kid
Corn is a small hard seed.
crickets
cut mats are even

Dear head to one side, in summer dusk, Olga
Deep well corporals ride alongside listen
Disguised as my next door neighbor,
Do not try to adopt me
Down near "The river
Do you read
"Do you realize how high kites are," he said. He let go
dragged to her cell
Drenched saw Doris home, midnight gale
During our encounters
During the past few months, Biff had become quite a fre-
Dying day pinches the tot

. . . either, over the shoulder enjoy leaning. Don't
Elaine, Nini, Sylvia, Marjorie, Theda,
En ma Provence le blé est toujours vert
Enormous heads,
Every morning I hear the bells ringing
EVERYTHING, the bridges of small yellow stars, cloud sleds
ex-

FELL FAR BUT THE BARN (came) up & smacked me
"Fifteen years past, this coming Sunday,

first range through
Flying from Greece to see Moscow's dancing girl
Foot still, and nothing to go,
"For the pleasures of the many
French poets are the greatest of all.
Friends are always those
from Aphrodite
From a window high over the factory
From point A a wind is blowing to point B
From the tug the shore crops are merely blurry wilderness
From this balcony

Gas sigh invert balk
Gliding over Hialeah, we wave goodbye
God created his image.
Goodbye sting and all my columbines
Good God!!
Good morning all
Grace to be born and live as variously as possible

Had West followed up her fine opening lead by dropping
Heavy bus slows, New York my ride
He is gliding on her like a block of ice
Hello America let's tell the truth!
He played with a toy they bought
Here come Charles and Madeleine my child
Here I am born a brilliant mistake from infinity
Hills fill the first of twelve frames,
Hours stand around the clock
How about an oak leaf?
How funny you are today New York
How many Excedrin'd you take? Five?
How slowly I sucked off

I am beginning to alter
I am kind to my neighbors
I am not anyone in particular.
I am not a painter, I am a poet.
I am smiling tonight not really
I am sorry that Che Guevara is dead.
I am trying to decide to go swimming,
I asked for something to eat,
I can't live blossoming drunk;
I cough a lot (sinus?) so I
I discovered the United Nations night building
I don't give
I dream of nude policemen investigating
I'd swish through the door
If I were Sophocles, brave with truth
If you've ever been in a car
"I keep my diamond necklace in a pond of sparkling water
I myself like the climate of New York
In a world where kapok on the sidewalk looks like an "accident"
In Bayreuth once
In her desperation she opens the gas-tap
"In Montana, claws skim through the dawn,
in praise of thee
Inside the lunchroom the travelling nuns wove
In the beginning nothing is congenial, not even the world
In the corner lot
In the history of nations
In the month when the Kamchatka bugbane
In the rain what is there to do, what to play.
In the snowy yard a baroque thermometer,
In the street young men play ball, else in fresh shirts
Into the nexus a webbed hand

in to the oily crotch
I pray you've finished
I said: "The flowers in this light are beautiful
I see the winter turned around
"I shall return!"
I stroll on Madison in expensive clothes, sour.
I suffer when I sit next to Joe Brainard's Painting "Bingo"
It is a distinct pleasure
It is a human universe: & I
It is only the orange light that brings forth the
It is 7:53 Friday morning in the Universe
It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
It moves across and over
"It's a damn skinny get-by
It's a great pleasure to
It's 8:54 a.m. in Brooklyn it's the 28th of July and
It's 5:03 a.m. on the 11th of July this morning
It's funny early spring weather, mild and washy,
It's he, it's sea. The sea is continuous; a continuous body,
It's my lunch hour, so I go
It's odd to have a separate month. It
It's 10 a.m. we got the jolly roger's gold
It's time again.
It will snow tomorrow
I wake up back aching from soft bed Pat
I walked by the pond
I wanted to be sure to reach you;
I will sleep

Just a little nudge, he said, and then

Knock on the forehead

Lark bender hair air
Laundry so near the ocean bothered Frank.
leading with his chin, though bristling
Leaped at the caribou.
Leaving the bambino home, by bus, afoot
left from gay behind private
Life was a thorough pool of restoration
Light became audible, that is, a child, and took the empty place.
Like musical instruments
Lily flower
listene
Looking north from 23rd the vast avenue
Love, love, love,
ly ly

M
Meanwhile back at the wrenched back
meat bubble when in
Milk used to come in tall glass, heavy and uncrystalline as
moon silent mike breasts
Mothers of America
Moth-eyed
Mr. Wild wore
My arms are warm
My heart in pieces like the bits
My life has been tedious
My misunderstandings: for years I thought “muso bello”
My thoughts turn south
My vision is emptying
My whistle is senseless

New Year's near, glass autumn long gone
New York's lovely weather hurts my forehead

night
No changes of support—only
No, I would not like to meet Bob Dylan
Now trouble comes between the forest's selves,

Oak oak! like like
obsidian lasher, partly pip oversmokes
O Earth Mother, who consents to everything, who forgives everything
Of who we and all they are
O height dispersed and head
Oh humming all and
oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh
Once children in Scotland contracted the throbbing foot
One day when I was studying with Stan Musial, he pointed out
On the secret map the assassins
On the spool pedestal
Opening up a mud duck
Orestes pointed out what was despotic
ounce code orange

Paint triggers the serene
Past is past, and if one
Pierre put the gold in the morning into the ring machine,
principally & before
prune acrylic whose

Quite is high

Rain and the thought of rain:
Râles of Easter . . . The sucking . . .
Returning from the movies we find
Roar drowns the reproach, facing him

San Francisco
Sea like a mirror.
Seven Cuban
Shops take down their awnings;
Shouldn't I ask
Soft-man is denizen
So as I was saying to you
So gay on your lovely head
steps, shops, noses, ears, eyes
Suddenly I was in the act of soaping my head
Summer so histrionic, marvelous dirty days
Suppose there's a cranky woman inside me who
Sweeter than sour apples flesh to boys

Talk of energy. Mayan sub-flower
Thank you for your letter
That is why I am here
The academy of the future is opening its doors
The air is interesting
The allegorical Figure of Brooklyn is right here,
The arctic honey blabbed over the report causing darkness
The ba ba lanolin fur-ears
The bay today breaks
the bunks in the bogus square
The buttocks of the ruffed grouse
The cat I live with is an animal
The Cemetery Plot of Ed Sanders
the chords knotted together like insane nouns Dante
The day I was born
(*The designs on the sidewalk Bill pointed out*)
The direct retinal Flood
The door behind me was you

The experience of writing you these love letters . . .
the fecund plantation
The finest thing in the world
The funny thing is that he's reading a paper
The giant Norway spruce from Podunk, its lower branches bound,
The grand republic's Poet is
The great moral of my next set of
The great worm of the north, in whose footsteps we tread,
The ground is white with snow.
The growth of raw power brings you to one knee
The Harvey Girls invaded Kansas that spring of the famine
The last time I slept was when
The logic of grammar is not genuine it shines forth
The mind burns its wafers.
The muse at daybreak stuttering, informs my bed,
the name
The orgasm completely
The pied quarts of Chevrolets trim blent Sir her eyes on
The poem upon the page is as massive as
The railway stationery lay upon
There is a green light which pets feel
There is a hornet in the room
There is a lobster in the ocean
There is nothing on the
There was no reason to go back now
There were more dirty
The scream of teeth is contortion tied
These lacustrine cities grew out of loathing
The sermon educates
These wonderful things
The shopping cart clatters out of the Safeway, a young man
The shoulder of a man is shaped like a baby pig.

The size balls are saddens Lamarck
The sky is cut into sections and put on a frame.
The society in my head
the steamshovel, seen from afar,
The strokes of mania on this vanilla
The Sun woke me this morning loud
The Supper Club meets in the evening
The swallows
“the: the”
The Venus Fly Trap
The Vivian Beaumont
The white attic rests
They commune at 7:30 where I walked my arid hands
They sleep, eyeing the mountain peaks and clefts
Thin air I breathe and birds use for flying
Three students
throat-to-throat surgery
Today I am in the room watching the sun evaporate.
Today I get this letter from you and the sun
Today I met my woman in the subway . . . it was winter.
To have even a portion of you is the highest
Too late, when you show some
torgh
To the me of my own making, seeing I am here,
Travel gets us through the breach
tubs of . . .
Two

Under the French horns of a November afternoon

Waitress

Wait until the revelation

Wasps between my bare toes crawl and tickle; black
We are nude beneath our costumes
We are watching for someplace to eat. We feel we are prey
We eat and hear, as your kiss descends
We hold these truths to be self-evident:
We put our heads here, and see nothing but beautiful yellow flowers.
We rejoin our hero at the edge of a vast, impen-
We see us as we truly behave:
We told them the myths about others
We will have to go away, said the girls in the circus
We won't favor you
What color is the hole in your socks? A kind of water-mark
What I think in February is there for April.
What we need is a great big vegetable farm!
When I arrived last night
When I began this poem about our directions
When it sank it thundered.
When my house is raped
When that everybody's legal twin Mrs. Trio
Where are the brass islands?
whistling in the street a car turning in the room ticking
Who is that school-girl?
Why is everything I do in my life like a boomerang?
Williams died two years ago yesterday
Wind, cold, rain.
Winter crisp and the brittleness of snow
With a brilliant sun causing his tears.
Woke this A.M.
"Worse than the sunflower," she had said.
writing inside

Yes, they are alive, and can have those colors,
Yippeel she is shooting in the harbor! he is jumping
You approach me carrying a book
You are bright, tremendous, wow.
You can't spend all day staring into the sea, however
Your body has narrow slits instead of
You were wearing your Edgar Allen Poe printed cotton blouse.
You will like their upstairs

AGAINST INTERPRETATION

Dara Wier

(might as well be ironing) (a complicated blouse) (or sorting seeds) (you could be watching) (I could be walking) (in a daze) (in a cemetery) (scattered in the woods) (you could be in there) (hiding) (it would be just as well) (to be unstitching thread) (from a perfectly hand-stitched hem) (counting) (something that doesn't) (need to be counted) (combing through things) (needing

no combing) (untangling) (something already untangled) (we could be in a boat then) (we would have been fishing) (we'd be in a swamp there) (in one of its channels) (with cypress trees everywhere around us) (it would be almost dusk now) (we'd be surrounded) (by owls) (they'd be looking) (as if they couldn't see us) (that's when our line broke) (we had to leave it) (we couldn't take it with us)

(we left it behind) (it was abandoned) (forgotten) (no use to us anymore) (an obstacle) (a barricade) (a battery) (of too many questions) (we didn't tell them) (where we were sleeping) (what we were doing) (we didn't say) (what they wanted to hear) (we kept our own

counsel) (we unlearned their language) (we
turned off our recognition meters) (we went
back to zero) (before that) (we were negative

numbers) (we were useful) (we were a way
around) (very many contradictions) (we were
like circles) (we were overlapping) (one
another) (we were looking for similarities)
(where ever we looked) (we would find them)
(saying goodbye) (in the morning) (snow
would be all over everything) (all'd they
leave were their footprints) (wind would
blow them away) (in fine smoking sheets

over the highways) (in sand smoke moving
over some beachheads) (we would be beach-
combers then) (we would be beachdrift)
(we would stick with the contours) (not to
disturb) (what we found there) (not to
erode anything) (not to damage) (what
hasn't been damaged) (anymore than it's
already been) (you go undamage something
then) (unbreak it) (unscathe it) (unhex it)

(uncross it) (unharm it) (undemolish some-
thing) (make a countermove) (deploy some-
thing) (makeshift) (something uncertain)
(without any strategies) (no trying to
outmaneuver anything) (without second guess-
ing) (go restore something) (reforest some-
thing) (remind yourself) (have your own
thoughts) (not someone else's) (remind your-

self) (where you stored something) (you might

want to find again) (to give it someone)
(you might want to keep for later) (not
something) (you go to bazaars for) (not
something) (you find on a rack) (not some-
thing) (you see in a catalog) (as though
through a dim light darkly) (in the pages)
(over the loudspeakers) (inside a seed
catalog) (where you can find complicated
blouses) (and gadgets) (good old time-

savers) (logic monsters) (economical grip-
pers) (rules) (they say we should go by)
(requirements) (things we must have) (as if
that were possible) (who could know so)
(there's nothing to base it on) (it has no
baseline) (nothing to stand on) (no balls)
(to go in or out or over it) (we were near
a very large grandstand) (a whip-cracking
stadium) (a people-pouncing mob was in there)

(they were watching fireworks) (exploding
over and above them) (they were busy) (cel-
ebrating some ancient victory) (their team
was winning) (we were watching) (a great
celebration) (a triumph) (a vindication)
(a mandate) (a result) (of their tenacious
certainty) (they were like giants then)
(we were like seedlings) (we'd just barely
started breathing) (our eyes weren't even open)

THE BRONZE BUG

(with that said) (they split the difference)
(we were turning away now) (we were forgetting
all about you) (not a passive activity) (we
were actively) (willing this to happen) (our
backs were to) (where you were) (but you were
no longer there) (as far as we were) (concern-
ed) (we were walking) (through) (snowfall) (
leaving behind) (our footprints) (headed into)
(a forest) (down a blind alley) (up over a head-

land) (straight into a tunnel) (we missed the
turn then) (we passed up) (our exit) (it was
behind us) (we traveled) (in a mild state of
confusion) (we took ourselves) (farther away)
(than we planned on) (furthered our already)
(plenty) (complications) (the days were getting
longer) (snow was falling harder) (gravity was
working overtime) (to make ends meet) (to stay
out of the poorhouse) (to get away from) (the

salvation army) (non-stop jingling) (bells over
buckets) (pray if you don't want) (to go hungry)
(be as intoxicated) (as prayer beads) (sober)
(as prayer rugs) (ask for something) (petition)
(do some beseeching) (go prostrate) (find a re-
vival) (sacrifice something) (worship water)
(idolize) (as if your life) (depended on it)
(idolize) (in overdrive) (rev up some devotions)
(it's a very holy) (tachometer) (it measures

how fast) (you are praying) (your prayers have)
(reached) (maximum velocity) (they are the loud-
est) (prayers in the world) (our prayer wheels
were spinning) (the roads were covered) (with
icy synapses) (we were about to be red-lined)
(grounded) (it was very bad weather) (we'd have
to sleep in an airport) (and learn all about)
(how to move) (the inventory) (and learn how to)
(appear to be harmless) (listen) (in on) (with-

out wanting to) (their latest strategy) (round-
the-clock) (ruses) (bombardments of stratagem)
(they were trying to) (hijack) (the word) (com-
passionate) (it was disgusting) (they were par-
simonious) (liars) (compulsive) (cheats) (supreme)
(egotists) (unrivalled) (and that was the sorry
news) (they were news rusers) (it was news) (that
wanted) (to be used) (to be parsed into pieces)
(to the least) (even the least) (common denomi-

nators) (were not what they were) (looking for)
(a place) (to get out of the rain) (in a blizzard)
(something empty) (to lie down on) (a cup of water
to pass around) (dry matches) (an axis) (and an
ax) (to grind) (because we are in the forest)
(looking for firewood) (when we come upon a beggar)
(who asks for alms) (and when the youngest of)
(us) (the one who is always) (the most beautiful)
offers the beggar) (more than is expected) (we're

given in return) (three buttons) (a bug cast of
bronze) (its belly is hinged) (inside are precious

jewels) (such as we've) (never seen) (and) (a ball
of string) (the size of a chickpea) (the color of
snow) (the weight of a fingernail) (and) (directions)
(we would never) (ask) (for directions) (to the)
(idol) (the man-eating) (idol) (of the) (keeper of
the paths) (through the forest) (into the woods)
(up to the levee) (where we put down one button)

(as a sign) (that we've been there) (and) (we
jump in) (the river) (we swim like fish swim)
(we worship the water) (which is oblivious of)
(all of our longing) (therefore) (the perfect
medium) (in which to be) (unconsciously) (stun-
ned) (axiomatic) (and) (declassified) (so) (we
put another button down) (and) (a fish-headed
god) (leaps up from) (the depths of eternity)
(swallows the second button) (a mother-of-pearl

(one) (and now) (we have just one button) (and the
chickpea) (and the fingernail) (and more snow than
ever) (it will be) (almost impossible) (to see)
(the idol) (we don't even) (know what it looks)
(like) (and) (so) (we consult) (we discuss) (we
propose) (argue) (remain) (in arcane) (ratioci-
nations) (thereafter which) (we were magnificent)
(stupifacients) (transubstantialists) (if you)
(touch us) (we will idolize you) (you will eat us)

THE LISTENER'S INTERPRETATION OF MUSIC: AN EXPERIENCE BETWEEN CAUSE AND EFFECT

Herbert Brün

To begin with, I shall have to ask for your acceptance of the following two points: If not specified otherwise, I shall use for the duration of this lecture the term *composer* always to speak of a person who not only wants to, but also knows how to compose Music. The term *listener* will not refer to a person who happens to have a radio on while doing something else, but to a person who for one reason or the other is intent on listening to some music. It is the relationship between the work of such composers and the reactions of such listeners which alone interests me today, and which alone warrants serious investigation.

Two listeners, happy and elated, are leaving a concert hall, where they had heard a composition which was new to both of them; after a few minutes of silence while walking together, they start a conversation. "I liked the piece," says one. "So did I," says the other. "Except," says the first, "where the oboe brings up the second subject. That didn't sound right to me or beautiful." "But it wasn't the oboe," retorts excitedly the other, "it was the clarinet. I thought it rather a good idea at that point, and I don't think one can call that a second subject."

At the end of that conversation, which lasted quite a long time, the two partners agreed in a bad mood that they *simply* didn't speak the *same* language,

nor about the *same* thing. The situation itself could be analyzed as follows: One look at the score of the work discussed would show whether it was the oboe or the clarinet which played at the crucial moment. By further analysis it is possible to clear up the question whether one can speak of a second subject, or whether the composition was built along lines which do not work with subjects. But nothing seems to help to decide whether the composer did at this point the right, the beautiful; whether the composer had a good idea here or not.

If a person does not know the difference between an oboe and a clarinet, then we can safely assume that the person either does not know the instruments or does not know the language. Because the terms *oboe* and *clarinet* have been accepted as words to be associated with invariable meanings, with certain specified objects.

When, after looking at the score, our two Listeners have agreed that it was the oboe that did it, and that it was, if not the second subject, at least the second section of a division in that composition, they still are stuck with either one of two questions. The one question would be: Was the entrance of the oboe a beautiful musical moment or not? This question implies that the term *beautiful* has been accepted as a word to be associated with an invariable meaning. In spite of the fact that many, many people live and act and speak and judge on the assumption that the word beautiful has a meaning accepted by everybody as part of *a language common to all*, this assumption proves wrong every time it is investigated. Words like good, beautiful, efficient, etc., have never passed the examination for acceptance in *a language common to all*. Because never was there any chance that different persons would associate the same meanings with these words, except by special agreement in each case.

The other question would be: Why did one of our listeners consider the entrance of the oboe at this point a good idea, and why did the other dislike it?

Now, this is the important question, because it directly deals with the difference of opinion, and not with the music. As long as listeners believe their likes and dislikes to be part of the music, they will sooner or later find themselves in a situation in which they reproachfully have to state that nobody speaks the same language. If, on the other hand, they admit speaking of one and the same music but of several different reactions, the discussion on the reactions may create what will eventually become *a language common to all*.

In other words: At a given moment *the language* considered *common to all* is able to pave the way to an agreement on the *facts* which have happened and could have been perceived. But to agree in terms, understandable to all, on the effects which such perceptions may have on the perceiver, *a language common to all* must be looked for, found; if necessary, be invented.

My conclusion: A serious conversation on the subject of the effects which an event had can *create* a language common to all. A conversation on the subject of the *causes* for these effects can get along with the *traditional* language common to all.

Assuming that the two concert-goers we overheard meet again, and that their inclinations to come to a correct evaluation of the event they witnessed are of a serious trend, we may continue their conversation like this: "There was," says the first, "something rough in the sudden entrance of the oboe." "Yes," says the other, "but I enjoyed at this point, what you call roughness, as a surprising contrast, which seems to me to be the musical idea here, rather than the relative sound value of the chosen instrument." "Well," concedes now the first, being a very well-disposed person, "if you consider *contrast* to be a musical element, then I shall have to listen once more to the composition, including *contrasts* in my field of musical perception."

Thus, just for instance, and, as I admit, in a rather simplified way, the term *contrast* may become a word of language common to all, describing a musi-

cal cause for a listener's reaction, and more important than the professional sounding controversy on the question, whether it was an oboe or a clarinet.

A composer causes an event, which reaches me, the listener, in an acoustical way, causing me to have an experience. My reaction to the experience causes an effect which I can communicate to myself and, if I find words for it, to others.

And the other way around: The communication of my reaction permits you to deduce from it my attitude towards an experience, of which I maintain that it was caused by a composer's work.

In both directions we get to a certain point where the relationship between the composer and the listener seems to be a very close one. At that point, namely, where we have put the word *experience*. Up to this point, it is the composition alone which is the event caused by the composer. For simplicity's sake we assume that it is correctly played. Whether the composition is heard or not does not change the matter up to here. But from this point on the listener is on the job. And (depending on how much of the event is experienced), *the listener* will be the cause of the effect which can be communicated to the listener or, if words are found for it, to others. The relationship between the composer and the listener is the closest at the moment when the composer cannot do anything anymore, when the work is being performed, and when the listener still can do everything, that is, let as much as possible of the event become an experience. That is the moment in which the new can become venerable and the old can become fresh: where the unheard of is heard and the unknown taken cognizance of; where private possession can turn into common good. I am speaking of that moment in art which lies between real life and artificial commotion, in short, of the moment of art.

The responsibility for it, that such a moment be fertile and worthy of all the questions and wishes attached to it, rests of course with the composer

as much as with the listener. It is absurd that throughout the history of music and its social functions, the word *genius*, frequently applied to composers, never yet has been applied to a listener. But I shall offer you a reason for this negligence.

All who write about music, biographers and critics, with all too few exceptions, use their talent as writers in order to report about *themselves* and what *they* looked like after having had an experience, instead of reporting their *experiences* in order to prove that they have *some* talent to hear and listen. It is this literature which condescendingly teaches the listener, haughtily informs the listener, and surreptitiously declares the listener to be unable to have experiences. Thus, listeners learn to consider themselves to be dilettantes, misguided by respect for what they are told to be professional knowledge and language.

In fact, of course, the listener alone is competent for the personal experience. The listener is not responsible for the composition which causes the experience, and is not entirely the master of the effects which the experience causes. But the listener is completely and absolutely free in the matter of personal experience. I shall soon elaborate on this claim. For such a panegyric in praise of the listener's freedom wants some qualification, not to speak of the necessary apologies to the composers.

One need neither be a philosopher nor a psychologist in order to understand that the terms pleasure, joy, satisfaction, etc. (when taken by their simplest and most general meaning) describe a frame of mind which is the result of having had one's wishes fulfilled or one's questions answered. Even one who is happy still *wishes* that everything would remain as it is. And the one who is eternally dissatisfied *desires* continual change. (In any case, there would be neither pleasure nor enjoyment if there weren't wishes and questions.) Even a displeasing answer is better than none, because whoever desires uncertainty simply does not ask questions.

Of course this also goes for such cases in which it occurs to me only at the instant of fulfillment that I had harbored a desire without, up to this moment, having been precisely aware of it. Or that I suddenly get an answer to a question which I never, not even to myself, had dared or succeeded to formulate.

Most people develop their wishes and desires out of experience. They wish to be something too, to have something too, to experience something too. Few people invent wishes and desires. If they do, one speaks of them as those who possess imagination and a talent for having ideas. If such a person also presents an example for the fulfillment of the invented wishes, then that person can be called the author of a work of art. And if the example is produced by musical means, then the author, who invented the wishes, is a composer of music, and the example for the fulfillment of these wishes a musical composition.

The composers find pleasure in that they first invent a wish or a question and then compose for themselves a fulfillment or an answer. The listeners to whom the composition is played can find their pleasure if they now find or invent wishes and questions for which this music means fulfillment and answer. The listener's pleasure depends on just the same talent for imagination and for having ideas as the composer's pleasure, and the title *genius*, or some less abused equivalent suitable to 20th century taste, is actually waiting to be granted to deserving listeners of music.

As soon as the listeners have understood the work which was heard as a function of wish and fulfillment, of question and answer, of problem and solution, even though the understanding is based on the wishes and questions which the listeners contributed, they then are ready for the next step in the process of appreciating the music. Now they look at the wishes and questions which they had to contribute in order to make the composition a fulfillment and an answer. And now the listeners decide whether they like

their new acquirements or dislike them. That, at last and after all, is what produces the effect which the listening to music has on the listener.

In short, I maintain that the composer causes the music and the listener causes the effect of the music. In between lies the experience of the listener, consisting of a mental activity, which is looking for pleasure. This attitude of listening to music, diligently active between cause and effect, is neither the analysis of the composition nor the criticism of its effect. To listen in such a way to music requires neither a professional musical terminology nor an aptitude for sociological diagnosis.

It is at this point where the language common to all occasionally seems to be inadequate, and where many music lovers, who wish to communicate their firm and honest opinions on some musical experience, hesitate and then come up with the apparently apologetic remark: "I do not really know anything about music, but . . . etc." They mean that they do not know the professional terminology. Would they really believe that they do not understand anything about music, I think they would remain silent. In fact, no musical experience can be described in professional language. This technical vocabulary is irreplaceable only when we attempt to explain how and by what means the experience was brought about. And that is a job for musical and psychological analysis.

The job of the music critic would be to estimate which merit a musical work has, first, as compared with the general situation of music, and second, as to the impact it has or might have on the musical public's listening attitude. The merits of older music can be deduced, with some qualifying reservations, from the living interest in them of society. The merits of a new musical composition become perceivable by the degree in which society has to widen the horizon of its interest in order to find pleasure in listening to this music. It is an assumed privilege of music critics to pass speculative judgments on the value of such horizon-widening experiences, and to pass

their opinions on to the public. But one should know that the interest of society, which those critics try to represent, is not their object, but rather their goal, their loot. Their opinions, therefore, on the value of progress in the arts are never quite free.

The freedom of a person to have an *own opinion* is not disputed. But this does not justify the assumption that the person made use of that freedom when the opinion was adopted, nor does it justify the belief that a freely maintained opinion could be free of inevitable consequences. The law in several civilized countries declares the personal opinion of a witness to be incompetent and irrelevant when the purpose lies in finding the truth. Honesty reflects on what a person actually knows, not on what that person could have known. Assuming now that you in all honesty make use of your freedom to form an opinion on some experience, we could say with other words that you apply to the experience all that you know. But not more than you know, if you are honest. Doubtlessly, honesty is a credit to a person. But the more a person knows, the more credit the honesty deserves.

As long as listeners of music ask whether they liked or disliked the composition, the listeners alone are competent for the answer. And unless I want to change these listeners and their attitude towards listening, the listeners' decision is not open to dispute. But should they ask whether it was a good composition, which they liked or disliked, then they propose to separate the information on themselves from the information on the work. That is, they propose to criticize the *cause* for their experience separately from the *result* of their experience, namely the effect it had on them. Here, I believe, a dispute, a discussion, a controversy will prove fertile and interesting. For the quality of a composition and the methods of making an experience are subjects which, though limiting the freedom of opinion, give unlimited scope for adding knowledge instead of merely using it.

The line of reasoning which I try to communicate to you here was set into motion some time ago, after the first performance of a controversial piece

by a well known young composer. During the excited conversation which ensued immediately, and in which the composer, a man of terrific temperament, took part, I noticed with some dismayed astonishment that even those who had liked the experience started to look for “the reasons why” in the score, instead of looking into themselves. In the score, of course, they found the facts that caused the experience, but not the experience which they liked and which actually was the subject of the discussion. They had sacrificed their experience for its cause, and confused the interpretation of the listener with the analysis of the work. Either one is of importance, but to confuse them always leads to some boring disaster. As music is never meant to encourage boring disasters, the listening audience is requested to avoid the confusion.

If, after the performance of a musical composition somebody asks the question: “How is it that the piece had such and such an effect on me?” you may safely assume that the person who asks had, in some way, found pleasure in listening to the music. Whoever enjoys an event is much more prepared to investigate the causes for one’s satisfaction than one who withdraws, being disappointed, annoyed, or bored. One who is pleased exclaims: “I like that. I want it again. What was it and how did it come about?” While the displeased listener only remarks: “I did not understand it. It was bad. It was nothing. How can anyone dare to offer me such a thing as music?” Without, of course, elucidating what was meant by the expression “such a thing.”

Under the impression of a series of musical events it is occasionally helpful, in order to clarify one’s relation to the experience, if one asks oneself a few questions. The first question: “Was it something?” can be answered by one of only two words. Either “yes” or “no.” In case the answer is “no,” one means to relegate what happened into the realm of dreams and hallucinations, or one means to express by it the desire to escape the effort of understanding.

If the answer is “yes,” one can go on asking the second question: “What was it?” This question implies that the event possesses a real existence apart

from the impression it has made on the questioner, and that the answer should define that real structure of the event. The question does not imply that the vocabulary for this answer has already been created, nor that the real event necessarily falls into a category previously known and named. In art and science that which is already known usually is not asked for again. The question “What was that?” thus constitutes in such a context a demand for an act of searching and inventing, rather than of recognizing.

“In what way and by what means did the series of events constitute a coherent context?” is the next question. One frequently hears how after the performance of some new music, listeners complain: “All I heard was a series of disconnected events, which did not make any sense.” These listeners should investigate whether they do not use the term *connection* in a too limited way. In music, contrary to language, it is not the connection which makes sense, but it is the sense which creates the connection. Therefore, these artificial connections do not have to imitate the progress of causal, evolutionary, or dramatic connections.

The next question, and for today the last I have time to mention, is: “What did the music intend to mean, and how does that compare with what it actually meant to me?” This is really the listener’s question and the composer’s question and, last not least, the question which the music itself asks the listener. For this is to be remembered when one seriously means to speak about art: Works of art do not possess the kind of reality which forces people to take cognizance of it for the sake of their lives. They are not necessary unless one needs them. This need is a creation of the mind. At the risk of being reproached for exaggeration through simplification and accused of attempting gross flattery, I’d like to express my opinion as follows: Music is initiated by a need which listeners created in their minds. Music takes this need seriously. If listeners occasionally neglect or even ridicule their creation, the need, no wonder if then serious music seems to them to be needlessly aggravating.

There are three kinds of music for three kinds of listener.

1. First the music which reorganizes already established music elements into new patterns. This is music for the listener who enjoys the status quo, to be looked at from different angles.

2. Second there is the music which enlivens old patterns with new musical elements. This is music for the connoisseurs, the listeners who enjoy looking at themselves from different angles.

3. And last, but not least, there is the music in which *new* musical elements create *their* new patterns. This is music for listeners who are still conscious of the fact that, after all, *they* had once created the need for music in their minds, and who now are happy and gratified if this need is met, in that at last they *can* hear what they *never* had heard before.

So everything is nicely organized, and everybody could find whatever anyone likes. The only difficulty seems to be that usually you are not quite sure to which category you belong and to what kind of music you are listening. And if you confuse the three kinds of listener and the three kinds of music, your judgment will inform us of the confusion and not of the music or the effect it had. Now everybody has the ability to want something. So you can want to look at the status quo, at yourself, and at something new. You can, if you want to, adopt all three attitudes towards listening to music. The adoption of the attitude most suitable to the music in each case will guarantee the maximum of pleasure and the necessary minimum of understanding. To find this attitude demands a certain effort, a certain elasticity, and a considerable sense of humor. The pleasure in seeking and finding the suitable attitude, and the critical evaluation of the conditions under which it could be adopted, enable you, if you so wish, to pass the very important judgment of a listener on a musical composition which you heard.

The listener's interpretation of music refers to an experience *between* cause and effect. The experience is the pleasure in the *cause*. The *effect* is the expression of your approval or disapproval of this pleasure. *Your* criticism is *its* communication. (Provided that you are not a person who happens to have the radio on, but a person who for one reason or another is intent on listening to some music.)

GOING TO TOKYO

Sheila Griffin

I've been everywhere, from ten blocks
up the street, to San Francisco
with no people.

Good morning, white shadow
in collapsed space, it's Milwaukee
on a binge. No window to close, no punch to pull.

If I don't get out of here soon, those white
cracked vinyl surgery drapes
will punch a big Texas star and choke it. But first

I fold a paper map into a swollen grid
of plaster and step on the islands
where nobody's luck ever runs out.

ELEPHANT TEARS

I shall start once again
in the middle, and in a new
dress, different hair and
purple mardi gras beads
I'll shake the night away.
When the ground lets go
an angel slaps me to my wits.
My bags were packed,
I was ready to go, but she sang
a blue tobacco song to shrink my dreams, put
the dough in donuts, and lately, with
whole afternoons to live for, I go to the windows
of strangers, the soft and pasty-eyed—oh, to be
alone again, the white explosions
of stone, watching them rain.

ABSTRACTION AFTER MOTHERWELL

Carmen Giménez-Roselló

Not just surfaces.
Embedded horizontals.
The six-stroke face.

Five o'clock in the afternoon.
A dwindling black, high tide
opened and entered: glass blue.
Vermilion hot,
then white turned over.
The mirror is shut.

No mirrors. What we know
hasn't got a body.
The curved sky
is always a road between us.

Five o'clock, the slack
chrome tripwire. Ochre blocks
recede the wall. The red slit down the left.
Difficult to say
which is the sun.

ENIGMAS WE KNOW

brunets blow a hole into me.
I fantasize one in a t-shirt with scribbles
on him. We would be busted open like penny jars. I would
taketh and he would giveth.

nothing else can happen
because my muscles got invented for him.

daylight didn't come that way: me praying so. you loved so.
dearest big hands.

I paint your face into the pillow's
dissed heave.

and overlaps in our minutes becoming more frequent?
Doesn't that account for some things?

mistakes get so easy. the blunder around the cabaret,
the birthday, the day for dinner. those are all mine.

could not blundering be love, my love?

my window only looks into a parking lot fresh
with driving in and out.

I wish I was your coat right now.

SEVEN GENERA

Christof Scheele

GENUS *DISTORSIO* RÖDING 1798

Writhing Shell

Field Note (Lamarck):

Today was good
for nothing, sun all
day, all of us
drunk again.

Found it back
a ways, seven
whorls, in grass, don't
know what the hell

to call it.

McGinty's Writhing Shell

Field Note (Emerson & Puffer):

Distinct. Collected 7:36
this a.m. shallow

littoral. I example. I
1/4" White to yellow-
white. 6 whorls Terminal has pronounced
bulge. Puffer notes
comparison to Lamarck, pronounced
teeth on outer lip. Aperture:
small. canal short. Puffer very
animated. Held it. cried
Eureka! Called to me
Kissed it

GENUS *ERATO* RISSO 1826

Mauger's Erato

Field Note (Gray):

Letter from E, still much distracted in Charleston Not to arrive till
Easter,
likely later. Ague again Night sweats, no appetite past seven days. I despair
of ever having strength to work again. Walked the beach just south last
week, good weather.
found a smooth pale shell

~~I long for her. thirst all night — no water~~

GENUS *CHARONIA* GISTEL 1848

Trumpet Shell

Field Note (Lamarck):

Woke like an ass
near noon. Forgot
where I was. No
dream. First
an orange, then
rum again. Down
to the shore around
dusk.

This one is
long, a horn, wouldn't
fit in my pocket.

The light was going
fast, already dark
where I stepped
on it.

GENUS *ANCISTROSYRINX* DALL 1881

Pebbled Star Turret

Field Note (Dall):

Specimen 1. Height: two inches. Surface pebbled with small, sand-like beads. Color a pale, mottled yellow. Fairly remarkable spire. Volutions slope-shouldered. (No simple augur.)

Specimen 2. Smaller (one & three-fourths). Surface smoother, more mottled. Canal opening tighter.

Specimen 3. Surface worn smooth as previous. Canal smaller still. (Tight enough that upon inspection my probing finger was stuck for several seconds between the lips.)

GENUS *TURBONILLA* RISSO 1826

Bush's Turbonille

Field Note (Verrill):

After lunch, having found
nothing ~~the five years days~~
~~previous~~ for five days, we walked
the sound north end of the Sound.

(My hand still shakes
to think of it)

Near dusk, I saw
what I thought
was an Elegant, but this ~~shell~~
shell was taller, eleven
flatter whorls, with sutures
slightly impressed.
I noticed then the weak
vertical ribs, the aperture [sic]
a small dark oval. [The C]olumella
flattened on my pal[m] I ran
[off after] Bush. ~~I couldn't~~
~~speak~~

GENUS *OLIVELLA* SWAINSON 1831

Dwarf Olive

Field Note (Say):

1/2 inch high. Solid. 4 distinct whorls. Spire small. (The tip of an acorn.) Clearly an Olive, but not the Jasper Dwarf or Caribbean. Whitish. 3 bands revolving purple-brown. Take care in future—outer lip hard and sharp. Inner without plications. Possibly distinct. Check Ravenel, et al.

Rough sketch (detail, watercolour later) →

Also, small horny operculum.

GENUS *PSEUDOCHAMA* ODHNER 1917

Left-handed Jewel Box

Field Note (Lamarck):

Rain this morning, huddled
under a wreck I
overtaken. Hair
in my eyes. Tried to recall
the last time
I shaved. Couldn't.

I fell asleep,
found my dumb
grey Box small
as Gmelin's
under my hand
among the broken
cockles. Inside
it's brown. I thought
of a name. I held it.

ISLANDERS

Joe Fletcher

The sand is cold.
The oceanographer stands stooped
with his hands on his knees.
Did he throw up?
Is he studying something that the ocean
dropped off? He's unsteady.
Last night, drunk and shirtless,
he told me of his youth.
I saw that his nipple was missing.
He said the stars were *flying*.
And yet: there they were.
Something squeaks.
A bird, or is a machine running
Inside one of their tents?
Oh. It's a girl on a bicycle
riding along the dock.
She's pregnant.
Her eyes are glassy
but she looks refreshed.
She rides off the end of the dock
and I think for a moment
that she is free, but
she swims ashore to take part
in what they do and what they do
they do quickly with much shouting,
consulting the briny ropes of kelp

and the still-beating heart of a sturgeon.

It's not going well.

Last week a ship came with cows
and now the cows stand around
looking frightened. A few got
confused at night and the tide
took them out and the fish got
to them and the bones washed back.

The children like the bones
and make small forts with them
in the sand. The oceanographer
sits with his head in his hands.

A boy whistles to me
through a massive ribcage.

from JANE

Maggie Nelson

ORDER OF EVENTS

THE PLAN

She was going home alone
to announce that she and Phil
were engaged.

Phil had been offered
a job at NYU; Jane
would leave Michigan

and start law school
there too. But
she feared

disapproval
from her folks,
a scene blunt

as dead
sticks.
Was it because

he was
Jewish. Was it
because he was

a Marxist.
Or was it
just because

he would take her
to a world far removed
from their own.

She hashed it out with her sister
for hours on the phone.
The plan: a night

at home, alone,
to weather the storm;
Phil to join her

in a few days.
Just trust me on this one, Barb
Trust me

was the last thing
to her sister that
Jane would say.

*

THE RIDE BOARD

In the basement of the Student Union
hangs a framed map of the United States,

the land divided into numbered regions.
Each region is a faded pink or gray.

Below the map is a cherry-wood shelf
of numbered cubbies, and a supply of slips

of orange and blue paper. It's a good system—
you write your name and number on a slip

along with where and when you need to go,
then stick it in the slot for that region.

*Would appreciate bearing from anyone
who might be driving to Muskegon*

any time Thursday (3/20/69), was the note Janie left.
Someone who called himself David Johnson

gave her a call. Apparently he was late
to pick her up on Thursday; she left

a phonebook on her desk open to the page of Johnsons,
a check mark by his name. Later on, a guy

at a frat house where a David Johnson lived
told the police

that a girl had called shortly after 6:30 p.m.
asking for him, saying

he was supposed to give her a lift home.
They told her she must have the wrong number—

their David Johnson starred in a play every night,
and had no plans to drive to Muskegon at all.

Was she confused? Did she feel for a moment
that something wasn't quite right?

Just then a honk comes from a car outside:
she grabs her bags, runs downstairs, gets in the car,

and drives off into the night.

☆

I 96

That ribbon of highway stretches from one side of the mitten-shaped
state to the other,

across tracts of flat fields, dark and bald in a March night.

When Jane didn't arrive home, her father went out looking for her.

He felt sure there had been an accident that hadn't yet been reported.

He headed out alone on I 96, around ten or eleven at night.

Somewhere on the other end of that ribbon, Jane was probably still alive.

His eyes searched the shoulder until Lansing
where he turned around, drove home, and called the police.

I don't know if he played the radio.

I don't know if there was a moon, or if he could see it from the road.

*

THE GIFT

The next morning, about fourteen miles outside Ann Arbor,
a boy found a bag on the gravel road by his brick house
on his way to school.

There was a gift in the bag, along with a folder
thick with typewritten pages.

Dearest Mom—Sorry I'm late for your birthday, but

in one hundred years, you'll never know

the difference, read the card

on the gift. The boy brought it in

to his mother, who noticed there was blood

in the bottom of the bag.

She went outside to look around, and soon spotted

what looked like a body

propped up on a grave

in the little cemetery across the way.

Inside the box was a pair of fluffy blue slippers.

But who opened it later? Was it

a policeman who read

I love you, Janie

then undid

the ribbon on the gift.

*

POSITION

Right arm stretched above her head,

left arm over her eyes.

One shoe on her abdomen,

one shoe set beside.

Her raincoat laid out over her body,

her head on a stranger's grave.

Some later called it

“a reverential display.”

*

“Nothing could be more crushing to any family than to have a police officer appear at the front door and grimly announce that a beloved child has been taken . . . And yet, after reeling from the first shock, Dr. and Mrs. Holder managed to make Lieutenant Baker's job easier. Somehow they collected themselves; seeming to draw reserve strength from one another, they regrouped and retained control. It happened in a matter of seconds, before the policeman's eyes, and it was marvelous.”

—Edward Keyes, *The Michigan Murders*, a “true crime” account with changed names

✧

DIGNITY

They knew how to mourn

with dignity,

my mother says.

It's the Calvinist way.

As if keening on your knees

were somehow obscene

As if there were a control

so marvelous

you could teach it

to eat pain.

✧

AFTERNOON EDITION

After their three-hour drive to Ypsilanti,
the police waited to show them the body.

First they sequestered them in a small room
and showed them photos of sex offenders,

asking if they recognized any of the faces.
After two hours of this, my grandfather

asked if they could step across the street
to get something to eat. At the restaurant

they saw the paper, the afternoon edition
that comes out late in the day.

University Coed Found Slain, the headline read,
and below it, a photo of Jane.

*

(Jane's diary, 1966)

*I can become a very tragic figure in my own mind
if I don't make an effort to be gay.*

Treating things lightly is indeed the answer to so much.

*

SHOCK

When they came home from identifying the body,
her father was confused about something.

He asked Barb repeatedly,

Had Janie dyed her hair red recently?

No, she kept answering,
she had not.

*

THE FUNERAL

The police told
them: Look
carefully

at everyone
at the funeral,
even those

you think you
know. Then
when it's over,

scour the pages
of the guestbook
for names

you've never
seen. The chance
that the killer

will be there
is much greater
than you'd think.

*

ORDER OF EVENTS

The autopsy report confirmed
that all strangulation and beating occurred

after she was already dead
from two shots in the head.

I don't know how they know.

Part of me thinks they just tell you so
so you don't split off—

Charred flakes adrift

in a boneblack madness

✱

CRANK CALLS

Apparently they're quite common
after an uncommon death. Just

bored college kids, calling after
getting high, or local high school boys

made bold by youth and cruelty. Strangely
enough, the one who called most often

was a woman, a disembodied female voice
fake-crying in a kind of falsetto

Where's Jane, boo-boo-boo
where's Janie, boo-boo-boo.

The police insisted
the family answer each call.

I imagine my grandfather
in the middle of the night

in his flannel pajamas, his eyes
shrunken and bleary without

his glasses. He sits on the edge
of the bed, speaking quietly into

the tapped phone. *Stop calling,*
he says. *Please leave us alone.*

SOME QUESTIONS

THE GAP

Consciousness
does not appear to itself
chopped up in bits,

William James
once said.
It appears to itself as continuous.

But there can be
holes in time
the mind tries

to ignore, holes
that perforate
the felt of the

night sky.
An aching gap,
James said, trying

to describe
the space made
by a lost word.

*To fill it up
is the destiny
of our thoughts.*

What transpired
for five and
a half hours

between Jane
and her murderer
is a gap so black

it could eat
an entire sun
without leaving

a trace. *Listen
hard enough,*
James said.

*You can hear
the rhythm
of the ache.*

*

THE ARGUMENT

There was an argument going on, one with subtle terms.

Can anyone like blood the way one likes the mountains or the sea?

Two slugs turn the light of the mind into dull meat.

Answer me.

✱

(Jane's diary, 1966)

Questioning is healthy—opinions that are unstable are great.

Pseudo-certainty is the worse crime. Nothing is absolute.

No one has all the answers. Pretense is hideous.

This whole essay is a bunch of crap.

✱

AT DENTON CEMETERY

Fresh tire tracks

and the heel print

of a man's shoe,

the only clues.

THE CALL

My mother remembers something about
Jane making a call for help—

a frantic call from a public phone.
But when I ask whom she called

or from where, my mother admits
her memory on this point

is far from clear.
I've looked and looked,

but there's no record
of any call. No:

when Jane disappeared,
she disappeared whole.

It's a fantasy, I suppose—
a way of breathing air

into the cramp
of that night. It gives

my mother another chance
to fail, Jane

a chance to fight.

✱

SERIALS

One girl in 1967,
another in 1968.

Jane in March of '69.

The next girl just four days later—
then one in April,

one in June,
and one in July.

“Each of the girls was killed
and her body left off some lonely road

in or between two towns
whose outskirts are only two miles apart,”

explained *The Detroit News*.
On maps and records,

they each get a number;
Jane is number three.

My family remembers the fourth
as a prostitute, but really

she was just a junkie, aged
sixteen. Her body was simply

destroyed, as if
making up for

whatever Jane was spared
a few days before.

My grandparents had no interest
in talking to the other families;

There were differences between us, they said.

Just as you'd expect, some wanted vengeance,
some wanted to sue the University,

some talked a lot about God.

My family folded in
on itself, accepting the case as unsolved

Shuttered the windows of that house
and sternly commanded themselves

to count their blessings
and move on.

*

DEMOGRAPHICS

“All the victims have been independent and politically liberal,”

the paper said, i.e., girls who would be God.

Three “coeds,” a graduate student in art, an eighth-grader, a runaway,
a law student.

The world is ours, but we walk in it
noticed.

*

GOD’S COUNTRY

“All agree that in an extremity we are to seek God’s guidance and help. There are probably not one or two, but hundreds upon hundreds or even thousands upon thousands of Christians here in Ann Arbor who would be willing to make [apprehending the killer] a matter of prayer.”

—letter to *The Ann Arbor News*, July 1969

I had not quite a dream though it was something equally sinister. There was a large church behind closed doors and a gate. I knew this church promised

salvation at the hands of a row of white preachers and a choir of black singers who mooned into the evening. *It's guaranteed*, the preacher screamed. Behind the closed doors I could hear the shouts of people in rapture, see the shadows made by the legs of running children. I walked by with my collar pulled tight around my face; I was wearing a thin blue jacket that could not keep out the cold. *Read the red parts!* a woman guarding the door whispered to me. *Read the red parts!* And it would be there that love would redeem, and that redemption would be love.

I stay outside the gates. The dirt of the street is bone-white. I hang out with some hunchback mourners, eating seeds, rolling marbles between our fingers.

*

LEFORGE ROAD

It was an abandoned barn off LeForge Road

the kind of place where teenagers go

to drink and to fuck

where the police found traces

of "fairly fresh, human blood."

Also found:

a girl's plate-gold earring;
another's mohair sweater;
strips of a "drip-dry" white blouse

and a piece of black electrical cord
just like the one used to strangle the fifth girl
a few days before.

Soon after the barn is staked out
it burns down, and someone lays
"five plump lilacs"

in front of the smoking debris.

A local kid later confesses to the arson;
the flowers remain a mystery.

*

ASIDE

I am copying all these details
from *The Michigan Murders*, a book
that sickens me. Its subtitle:

The Most Barbaric Sex Crimes of the Century!

Somehow I need to make it clear:
none of these details belongs to me.

*

STAKEOUT

After the seventh girl was found dead in a gully,
the police chose not to notify her family immediately.

Instead they replaced her body
with a mannequin from J.C. Penney

in case the killer returned to the scene,
an apparently common activity.

A man did appear in the woods that night,
a young man in a loose light shirt.

But in the August downpour, the police fumbled
with their walkie-talkies

as the man ran to his car, his headlights
disappearing into the woods.

✱

HEADLINES

The case gets stranger and stranger.

A group called the Psychedelic Rangers

brings a psychic in, who says things like,

Her face was beat, beat, beat. It was wrinkled like a monkey's.

A curfew is imposed on all local college women;
the governor finally asks the F.B.I. to step in.

Then on August 1st, 1969
a photo of a man walking on the moon
appears on the front page
of *The Ann Arbor News*.

The caption:
“Two Apollo 11 astronauts romped
in an eerie, unreal world . . .
Above was a coal-black sky.”

But above this photo was a much bigger headline:

SLAYING SUSPECT HELD:

Collins Is Called “Quiet, Nice Guy.”

✱

ONE MISTAKE

John Collins was a junior at Eastern Michigan University.
His major was education.

His uncle was a police sergeant
who, after returning from a family vacation,

noticed some large patches
of black varnish

sprayed on his basement floor. Curious, he scraped
the stains up, and found

what he thought were spots of blood.

They weren't, but an investigation had begun.

Before long, the police did find blood,
over by the washer.

In time the police also realized
that the thousands of short hairs

littering the basement floor
from clipping the family's hair

might match those found on a certain
Karen Sue Beineman's underwear,

which had been found stuffed inside the vagina
of her dead body.

John had been the only one in the house
while the family was gone;

he had been feeding the dog.

A year later, at his trial, the assistant-prosecutor
closed his argument by saying

Collins made “one stupid mistake . . . he sprayed black paint
on that basement floor to cover up

what he thought was blood.”

Or, another way to put it:

The imaginary is what tends
to become real, and when it does

there's no paint black enough
to cover it up.

*

COLLINS'S STATEMENT

“I have two things to say, your honor. One, I honestly feel that this community tried to give me a fair trial and that the jury did not take this matter lightly. But in view of the prevailing mood of the community, I feel that

the events presented during the last six or seven weeks have been blown all out of proportion. I think this was a travesty of justice. I hope someday that error will be corrected. Second, I never knew a girl by the name of Karen Sue Beineman. I never held a conversation with Karen Sue Beineman. I did not take the life of Karen Sue Beineman.”

—*The New York Times*, August 29, 1970

*

JOHN COLLINS

“Collins was implicated, at least superficially, in fifteen murders . . . Conversely, there is some doubt that Jane [M], the third presumed victim, was actually slain by Collins.”

—Joseph C. Fisher, *Killer Among Us*

His name sounds like a drink.

He looks a little like a guy I used to know.

He was handsome, and once posed half-naked

for *Tomorrow's Man*, a quasi-pornographic magazine.

Looking for his “dark side,” one book notes that he had “unusual tastes”—
i.e., sometimes “dressed with a flair to stand out in the crowd.”

In retrospect, some girls said he could be “moody” or “sexually aggressive.”

That maybe he liked riding motorcycles more than he liked them.

Others recalled that he hated women with pierced ears, because

“the holes defiled their bodies.” Psychiatrists told an old story:

“boundless rage against the female sex, a particular coldness

to his mother.” Some traced his “psychopathic ideology”

to one of his college English papers, in which he wrote:

“If a person holds a gun on somebody—it’s up to him to decide

whether to take the other’s life or not. . . . It’s not society’s judgment

that’s important, but the individual’s own choice of will and intellect.”

Nothing ties him to Jane’s death except

some shells of a .22 found in his room

the rumor that he used to do target practice

near Denton Cemetery, where she was found

and the fact that the murders stopped
once he was no longer around.

✱

FILTHY

My grandfather thinks
they got the right guy.

For years my mother thought
the police gave him reasons why

that no one else could know. But
when we ask him now what they were

he tells us a story about visiting Jane
several years before her murder

in a filthy dorm, with long-haired guys
gunning their motorbikes outside.

*It was a filthy place, he says. Just
a filthy dive. And John Collins,*

one of those filthy guys.

✱

CONVERSATION #1

I ask my mother if she thinks
John Collins killed Jane.

*I really don't know, she says,
but I don't like to think it through.*

*If he didn't, she says, I come back
to the more terrible thought:*

It must have been someone we knew.

*

MAIL ORDER

I order a copy of Collins's jail admission card,
made when he was 23.

Prisoner number, right thumbprint.

Build: Slender. Complexion: Ruddy.

Religion: C. Term: LIFE,

for Murder, 1st degree.

I wish it did, but none of it seems

all that extraordinary to me.

Instead I feel a space growing

between this man

and Jane, a space

like a windy corridor.

This corridor exists

to separate murder

from murderer. From here I see

it is Jane's murder

that interests me.

His crime does not.

THAT IS HOW WE ARE

Andrea Zanzotto

At Padua, they said, the friends,
“I knew him also.”
Nearby, the grumble of dirty water,
of a dirty factory:
stupendous in the silence.
Because it was night. “I
knew him also.”
Sharpening the thought
of you who are now
neither subject nor object,
neither plain speech nor jargon,
neither quiescence nor motion,
nor even that
for which my eyes
have threaded the eyes of needles,
negating you not
enough.

So be it: still I
believe with as much conviction
in all my nothingness.
That is why I haven't lost you.
Or rather, that the more of you I lose, the more you lose yourself,
the more alike we are, the closer we become.

ECLOGUE IV

Polyphemus, Phenomenological Bubble, Spring

Animula vagula blandula
EMPEROR HADRIAN

a—"Sweet" breath which stirs
the hatchlings, the comatose, the mute;
"sweet" mist which portends
a return to the covenant;
man, vagary,
improper light, to whom I won't respond,
whose foot falls like rain atop the world.

These meadows savor water, violets and silence;
into phials of lakes, the white snow spills.
Eye, oyster: I have seen,
in a wandering world, a wandering

Sun.

World, vagary, Spring,
into your thin psychoid you have summoned me,
to inhale the divine breath,
to play a little longer
in the soft saffron wax
of I and the world of Spring.
And so I come, direct, oblique,
And so I come—humped and smooth
as a gnawed-on seed, I drop and crawl
amongst the wools with which
the day protects its nascent chlorophylls;

then pop and rise and spin
as though stropped with a musical whip. For here, all things are as
“music.”

Not man, say I, but phenomenological ball.

Ah, Sunday is always Sunday,

after all.

To thousands of stimulations,
the phenomenological bubbles glisten and darken and burst.

Hope too is a sphere. And so is thirst.

I abjure the conventional literature.

Oh Spring of nits and cocci,
of liquor, gods, and suspense,

“Would that I

could find new words”:

but the petals and the petal’s edge, the grass and the grassline blur—

such play becomes its players. Radiant monads,

crowds, corymbic bubbles and yourself

still round, a full circle,

the infinite eye of Polyphemus.

Po—No. There is no new ground to break here. Here, no one alters what
is written.

Here is relapse. Here, the reluctant routine.

A joyless machine inscribes with fire
its vicious circle

in the cave of my eye.

So swear I:

Polyphemus, spherical, monocular,

drunk on the Spring wine of Ismarus,

I, from whose debauched lips drips—life

(oh, wine of Ismarus; oh, life; oh, Spring!)

ECLOGUE V

“Lorna, gem of the hills” (from an epigraph)

Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas

Diffused beyond
beyond the firmament of winters,
liminal, harmonic,
my memory swells like a wave,
and divines you again
in waves, balm and faithfulness,
faith, crests plush with snow.
Diffused beyond
beyond the toil of the Spring,
whose precipice,
stepping back from itself,
favors the glad, unguarded eye
“with a more propitious path, a more propitious star”:
today, the hills are
thick as rose petals, waves of May,
suns bitten by briar and burr—a verdure
which instructs, reflects, identifies
everything.

“Lorna, gem of the hills,”
the vigil of my
eternal eye
shall not set
on the true, the vehement, the acute.
Instead, it expands
to encompass

heads of wild hair, how hands
adore the hatchling in its nest,
how cheeks burn crimson, having bared the breast.

“Gem of the hills”:
to whom I brought my years,
indignant and distraught,
in fury and in fear,
in whom I sought,
I sought: to disappear
into care and carelessness,
riotous fullness, avarice, I:
and you, gem, the pure dry death—
fabulous life—
were set before me, focused exactly,
so that neither misery nor hate
should distract me,
nor the wickedness of the fathers,
fortune-tellers, golems, kings,
nor clowns, nor scions, nor scum,
neither the King of the Censers,
nor of the Rosolios, nor the King of the Petroleums.
“There was neither chain nor crown”:
Lorna, reflected within you,
their ghostly doings were minimal,
their phrases, their butchery, minimal, minimal
how they butchered me.

Gem of the hills,
my mirific fly’s eye, icosahedron,
honeycomb of human substance,
yourself like fruit

as afternoon wages
war in a cloud of resinous dusk,
a font of clear water, of loveliness,
from which our myths emerge restored,
to which the oats owe vocal cords,
thoughts, unshadowed wings,
for whom the Summer sings
such loveliness,
ever-learning,
ever-thronged in breezes;
and each faint paralysis
each unexpected, biosacral collapse
reaffirms
a rursus burning
at the solstice, a rursus
reassumed, an intimation
of distance, of elongation,
of something already-done on the horizon, at the boundary.

Waves of woods, you will learn
the ring of friendships and consents,
of vibrating lips and she
plural as stalks, as stems, as leaves
in the sun:
orbit, vineyard of Renzo,
carte du tendre,
labyrinth of dew,
murmur of a thousand perpetual hungers
and sacred rapes
of the eye,
of the eye-acme,
vital, untenable,
systemic, monocular.

BY NOW

By now the primrose and the heat
at one's feet and the green acumen of the world.

Tapestries unfurled
the loggias vibrate in wind and in sun.
Peaceful larva of the thicket;
distant my pain, the thirst distinct
as another life in the lungs.

Here all that remains is for one to wrap himself in the landscape
and turn his back.

TO THE WORLD

World, be, and be kind.
Kindly exist,
and be sure to, try for, aim at, tell me everything.
And there I was, elusive, ambivalent,
and every inclusion meant about as much
as every exclusion.
Get up, big guy. Exist.
Don't wrap yourself up in myself.

The world, I believed, thus conceived,
adulterated thus,
super-falling super-failing
was only an I, badly-received
was I, badly-digested, fantasizing
badly-fantasized badly-paid
and not you, handsome,
not you: "sanctified" and "saved."
Up a little higher . . . to the side . . . to the side . . .

Be sure to (ex-des-res etc.)-ist,
and after all the prepositions, known and unknown,
you might still have a chance.
So behave yourself.
Let the machine do its work.
Get up, handsome. Get up.

Get up, Münchhausen.

—*translated from the Italian by Wayne Chambliss*

CARACAS

Eugenio Montejo

The buildings are so high
nothing can be seen now of my childhood.
I've lost my patio with its lazy clouds
where the light dropped ibis feathers,
soft Egyptian clarities.
I've lost my name and the dream of my house.
Rigid frames of buildings, tower on tower,
now hide the mountain from us.
The racket grows with a thousand motorcars for each ear,
a thousand sets of wheels for each foot, all of them deadly.
Men race after their voices
but their voices have wandered off
chasing the taxis.
More distant than Thebes, Troy, Nineveh
or the fragments of their dreams,
Caracas, where are you?
I've lost my own shadow and the feel of its stones.
Nothing can be seen any more of my childhood.
I stroll through its streets now
like a blind man, each day more solitary.
Its space is real, fearless, solid concrete.
Only my history is false.

—translated from the Spanish by Peter Boyle

THE ACUSMATA

Pythagoras

It is customary to think of Pythagorean teachings as two mutually exclusive disciplines: the scientific philosophy based on mathematical principles and the religious mysticism whose dogma is rooted partly in sympathetic magic. Since his death in roughly 496 B.C., scholars and chroniclers interested in preserving Pythagoras' reputation as a pioneer of mathematics have sought to discredit his reputation as a charismatic and reform-minded mystic, a reputation spiritual seekers have burnished at various times since the third century A.D. However bowed by the competing agendas and ideologies, the split is verifiably uncorrupt; the fact is that Pythagoras himself insisted on the division as a principle of pedagogy.

Pythagoras of Samos moved to Croton in South Italy at age forty (530 B.C.), made a great practical impact on the colony, and established a school that he divided into two parts. Students selected to study directly with Pythagoras were called *mathematici* and lived communally and learned elaborately the reasonings of Pythagorean philosophy, principally that all things are number or are expressible by number. Together they swore by the *tetraktys* (a diagrammatic arrangement of ten units in rows of one, two, three, and four, in the shape of an equilateral triangle, which, however turned, always exalts *monad* or the single unit, representative of a primal unity) and through math learned the affinities among astronomy, musical harmonics, and agriculture. The universal kinship of things through number had great bearing on the social realm, as well. This was the sole purview (blindly) of the *acusmatici*, the far larger class of unexceptional students who, according to fourth-century historians, received (some say, behind a veil) only “summarized instructions” “without demonstrations or conferences or

arguments, . . . non-discussable, . . . which they promised not to reveal, esteeming as most wise those who more than others retained them.”

Acusmata (known variously as maxims, injunctions, symbols, interdictions, counsels, auditions, and precepts) literally translates to “things heard.” The cryptic advisories appear earliest in the testimonial biographies written by the Neoplatonists Iamblichus, Porphyry, and Diogenes Laertius, which cite as a primary source the then six-hundred-year-old and now lost text “On the Pythagoreans” in Aristotle, where these instructions covering diet, hospitality, hygiene, and sepulture were probably enumerated in print for the first time. The present compilation may be the most comprehensive in English, and mostly I have printed the wording closest to consensus among the Neoplatonists; I have also given in a few instances, as indication of the beguiling differences among accounts, variants on an injunction.

Pythagoras left no writings of his own, and it is only the rare disciple who entrusted to a surviving son or daughter his commentaries for secret safe-keeping within the family. Therefore “inconsistencies” in Pythagoreanism, writes W.K.C. Guthrie, “are no cause for despair or for a hasty conclusion that the authorities are confused: they are no less likely to be a faithful reflexion of historical fact.” Obscurity is key. Joined in inferiority, the auditors enroll, file in, and wait for the veil to drop.

—*Brian Blanchfield*

Touch not the balance above the beam.

Do not pick up what had fallen from the table.

Do not pluck the crown.

Do not step over a yoke.

Do not sit on a bushel-measure. [Also given as: Sit not down on the bushel; Do not sit on a choinix (gallon pail); Do not sit upon a bushel basket; Do not sit on the corn ration.]

On starting a journey, do not turn back.

Enter not into a temple negligently, nor, in short, adore carelessly, not even though you should stand at the very doors themselves.

Sacrifice and adore unshod.

Declining from the people's major highways, walk in unfrequented paths.

One must not dip one's hand into the lustral vessel, or wash in the public bath.

Abstain from the fish *Melanurus*, or the blacktail, for it belongs to the Earth deities.

Dig not fire with a sword.

Help a man to take up a burden, but not to lay it down. [Also given as: Working with others lifting, you may set down a load, but do not lift it up with them.]

When stretching forth your feet to have your sandals put on, first extend your right foot; but when about to use a foot bath, first extend your left foot.

Do not without light speak about Pythagoric affairs.

Efface the traces of a pot in the ashes.

Nourish a white cock; but sacrifice it not; for it is a suppliant and sacred to the sun and the moon and also announces hours.

Break not the teeth.

Counsel nothing but the best for him who is being counseled, for counsel is holy.

Wear not the image of a God in a ring.

Do not look at yourself in a mirror by candlelight.

One, two.

Fail not to believe any amazing things about deities or ideas about the theic.

Be not held by uncontrollable laughter.

Do not chase after your wife, for she is a holy suppliant, wherefore, indeed, we bring her from the Vestal hearth, and take her by the right hand.

It is best to sustain, and show wounds, if they are in the breast.

Do not hold out your right hand to every person readily.

Speak not in the face of the sun.

Do not sleep at noon.

Rising from the bed, roll up the bedclothes and smooth out the imprint of the body.

Never sing without harp-accompaniment.

Eat not the heart.

Nor the brain.

Receive not the fish Erythynus.

Do not draw near to a woman for the sake of begetting children, if she has gold.

Abstain from beans. [Aristotle interpreted the rationale thus: A bean alone of almost all spermatic plants is perforated through the whole of it, and is not obstructed by any intervening joints; it resembles the gates of Hades.]

Transplant mallows in your garden, but eat them not. [Also given as: Grow the plant “moloche” but do not eat it.]

Wipe not out the place of the torch.

Make your libations to the gods at the ear of the cup.

Give way to a flock that goes by.

Avoid the weasel.

Refuse the weapons a woman offers you.

Kill not the serpent that chances to fall within your walls.

Feed not yourself with your left hand.

It is not right to eat generation, growth, beginning or end, nor that from which the first development (hypothesis) comes. This includes loins, testicles, genitals, brain, head and feet.

Abstain from flesh of animals that die of themselves.

Of salt, it is right to set it out as a reminder of the just, for salt preserves what it contacts, and is produced by the cleansing actions of the sun and sea.

Do not wipe the seat with a lamp.

Stick not iron into the footsteps of a man.

Sleep not on a grave.

Lay not the whole faggot on the fire.

Leap not from the chariot with your feet close together.

Threaten not the stars.

Write not in the snow.

Do not urinate towards the sun.

Do not wipe your bottom with a stick.

Do not cherish birds with crooked talons.

Do not split up on a road.

Do not urinate or stand upon the parings of your nails, or the cuttings of your hair.

Going away to a holy temple, kneel down, and the meanwhile neither think nor do anything pertaining to one's regular life.

One must not turn out of his way to a temple; one must not make God a side-issue.

Avoid a sharp sword.

Wear not a narrow ring. [Also given as: Do not wear a ring.]

Suffer no swallows around your house.

Spit upon your nail-parings and hair-trimmings.

When the winds blow, kneel down to Echo.

Eat not in the chariot.

Never break the bread.

Always turn a vinegar cruet away from yourself.

Always have your bed packed up.

Quit not your post without your general's order.

Cut not wood on the public road.

Roast not what is boiled.

Abstain even from a cypress chest.

To the celestial Gods sacrifice an odd number, but to the infernal, an even.

Turn round when you worship.

Touch the earth when it thunders.

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IODINE

Dean Young

I'm sitting with my refraction
in our bar, inexactly, according
to some law in the expiration

of foam in our beer. Easily
our third heart, its agony
a by-product like diamonds

inside coyotes. The bones are big
but the head remains unlocatable.
Simple clutch of daises? Scribble

with eyes closed? There is flight
in my future cookie, and nudity.
The tucked-out underlings of our lord

drop their lightning bolts
upon our pillow, in our tub.
Today my shadow's a green

branch through our heart. We
don't know whether to pull it out
or let it grow, let its leaves

get covered with soot then turn
gold and attract females of our species.
Maybe it wants to fill us with fruit,

bitterer and bitterer because
there's only one river where we were born
and it stays strapped to the sky. It hurts

when I walk by the store windows,
unmatched boots marching up a wall,
the grocery with its hanging sausages,

the brain-jumbling laundromat.
And when I try to sing.
Or anyone tries to sing.

THOMAS TRAHERNE DROPS IN ON THE 20TH CENTURY

Forrest Gander

ITS ORIGINAL

In 1967, a passerby pulled a leather-bound encyclopedia of poems and prose from a burning rubbish heap in England. In 1982, it was authoritatively attributed to 17th century poet Thomas Traherne and identified as his last consuming project. It now lies in the British Museum and its curious formal structure serves for the template of this essay about it. The full title of the Traherne manuscript is:

COMMENTARIES of Heaven
wherein
The Mysteries of Felicitie
are opened
and
ALL THINGS
Discovered
to be
Objects of Happiness.
EVRY BEING
Created & Increated
being Alphabetically Represented
(as it will appear)
In the Light

of
GLORY
Wherin also
For the Satisfaction of Atheists, & the Consolation
of Christians, as well as the Assistance & Encouragement
of Divines: the Transcendent Verities
of the Holy Scriptures, and the
Highest Objects of the Christian Faith are
in a Clear Mirror Exhibited to the Ey of Reason: in the Realitie and
Glory

ITS NATURE

Were we to look closely at even one poem from *COMMENTARIES of Heaven*, we would find that Traherne's visionary imagination surprisingly anticipates contemporary phenomenological urgencies, not releasing his work from the 17th century English and Christian contexts in which the poetry originates, but preparing a place for itself in our own moment wherein its implications continue to resonate.

ITS SUBJECT

What follows is an exemplary poem that appears between paragraphs of prose in a section of the manuscript titled "Spiritual Absence," under the subheading "The Desolateness of Absence."

That man is poor and desolate whose love
None seeks, no man solicits, none doth move,
Whose brightest splendors in the dark do lie
And all his great affections are thrown by.
Rust covers his resplendent fancy, dust
Soils all his powers, and his love doth rust.
His wit's unseen, his wisdom none admires,
His soul's unsought, his favor none desires.
None values his esteem, his sacred tears
No eye doth pity, fury no man fears.
His passions are hung o'er with cobwebs, and
His greatest virtues idle in him stand.
His courage nowhere is employed; his zeal
No beauty doth to any eye reveal;
His excellencies in a silent cave
Are hid; his very body is his grave.
His faculties are empty, all his powers
Are solitary, withered, blasted bowers.
His wide and great capacity is laid
Aside, his precept is by none obeyed.
His very worth's neglected and despised,
His very riches are themselves not prized.
He is the poor, forlorn and needy man,
That see, do, prize, enjoy, admire at nothing can;
Whose goodness can't itself communicate,
Nor avarice enjoy another's state.
Whose violent and endless love's displeased,
Whose great ambition is by no man eased.
Who no dominion hath, whom no man's eye
Doth prize, exalt, rejoice in, magnify;
Who reigns not always in another's soul,
Whose highness nothing can at all control.

Who cannot please far more the world! and be
A bliss to others like the Deity.

THE DESOLATENESS OF ABSENCE

ITS DISTINCTION

What is curious about this religious poem? Until the last line, there is no reference to God. Instead, the poem focuses on man's relationship to other men. More specifically, it describes the relationship of others to a spiritually desolate man.

ABSENCE AND ADVENT

By postponing until the ultimate line any mention of "the Deity," the poem acts out its desolation. The word *God* is absent from all sentences but the last because the subject has sentenced himself to desolation by absenting God from his soul.

The desolate man is conscious only of a world of negatives elaborated in twenty-two instances of *none*, *no*, *nothing*, *not*, and the prefix *un*. His is a living hell. All "His faculties are empty" and his "great capacity is laid / Aside."

Still, the poem implies that even at the final moment of his life, the man might alter his condition. The words "bliss" and "Deity" in the ultimate

line clarify Traherne's faith in the potential for redemption. Finally, all those grammatical and lexical negatives serve to point dramatically toward their opposites.

It is then, categorically, a poem of Advent. God's absence drains man's being of its fullness; without God, he cannot "be / a bliss." With the Advent of God, Traherne suggests, man will experience a gross bouleversement and his desolate consciousness will be transformed. His experience of desolation may even make salvation sweeter, for as Traherne notes in the "Instructions" on Absence that follow the poem, "The presence of God is more amiable to us, than it was before the fall. For the consideration of his love in our restitution is an infinite enjoyment: and perhaps truly greater than all the former."ⁱ

Three centuries after Traherne writes "The *Desolateness of Absence*," the phenomenological philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes that it is "*destitution . . . of absence* that constitutes the proximity of God."ⁱⁱ For Levinas, too, absence prefigures Advent, and "The negation that claims to deny being is still, in its opposition" involved with being. He iterates, with crescendo: "Negation carries with it the dust of being that it rejects."ⁱⁱⁱ For Levinas, as for Traherne, absence and negation presuppose presence and signification.

TORN AWAKE BY THE INFINITE

Traherne's poem describes a man asleep, his qualities all subtracted from their potentialities. His affections are "thrown by," cobwebs hang over his passions, his virtues are idle, and his splendors "in the dark do lie." Only God's love can reawaken what Traherne, in another poem, calls his "infant-eye" so that he might contemplate "infinity."^{iv}

On a curiously parallel path that also links the infinite to the “infant-eye” of newly awakened vision, Levinas suggests that the idea of the Infinite—the Infinite in us—rouses a consciousness that is not sufficiently awake.^v He explains, “Love is only possible through the idea of the Infinite, through the Infinite placed in me by the ‘more’ that ravages and wakes up the ‘less.’”^{vi} Such proposals find ample affinities in Traherne’s “The Desolateness of Absence,” which specifically chronicles the ways in which a man is *less* than what he might be were he awakened by the *more* of God.

BEING

For Levinas, the thinking of human being and the thinking of God’s being are complicated by the potential for God to signify a “beyond of being, or transcendence.”^{vii} This leads him to reconsider the traditional opposition between ontology and faith and to question whether “being is only a modality of perception.”^{viii} Traherne, equally concerned with God and with what it means to humanly *be*, gathers together these core terms in his poem’s last lines. The final rhyme between “be” and “Diety” not only brings the human and Godly into relationship, resolving the poem’s negative skew, but it models that relationship prosodically. The rhyme is, itself, the bliss of the human tuned to the Diety tuned to the human.

PRIMARY CONSCIOUSNESS AND MERLEAU-PONTY

Traherne’s emphatically childlike outlook on “EVRY BEING” in the extraordinary project of his *COMMENTARIES of Heaven* resonates and finds

philosophical rapport in the theories not only of Emmanuel Levinas, but of other 20th century phenomenologists.

It takes just a small step to connect the Advent of Christ to being, in Traherne's terms, to "the advent of being to consciousness"^{ix} which is how Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines the concern of phenomenology. Both writers advocate sweeping transformations of our normative modes of perceptual awareness.

For Traherne, the biblical injunction to "be born again and become a little child"^x invigorates his efforts to regain the "wonder" and "amazement" he felt as a child, to cultivate childhood "bliss" into a mature state of awe. Anyone who does so, he believes, will perceive the world to be a paradise, since "Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world, than I when I was a child."^{xi} Traherne advocates an "original simplicity,"^{xii} a condition of awareness that might exist before linguistic and cultural influences "Could breathe into me their infected mind."^{xiii} Consequently, he observes that "My very ignorance was advantageous."^{xiv}

Maurice Merleau-Ponty scarcely could have agreed more. He likewise blasted rational thought for its limitations, arguing that "Intellectualism and empiricism do not give us any account of the human experience of the world. . . ."^{xv} Like Traherne, he was obsessed with "attentiveness and wonder,"^{xvi} going so far as to claim that the best formulation of the phenomenological reduction^{xvii} was articulated by Husserl's assistant "when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world."^{xviii} When Merleau-Ponty makes his own case for a *primary consciousness*, he imagines a state akin to Traherne's "original simplicity," a pre-reflective awareness that reveals the "coexistence" or "coincidence" of an embodied subject with the world. It is the world, more specifically the body in the world, that structures perception, Merleau-Ponty insists, and he quotes Cezanne's boast that the landscape thought itself inside him and that he was its consciousness.^{xix}

Traherne makes a declaration just as bold and intuitive when he writes, "The world was more in me than I in it."^{xx}

FLESH AND COMMUNION

For both Traherne and Merleau-Ponty, the awakened consciousness makes evident a profound, extensive interpenetration of all beings and things and a consequent breakdown in the distinction between subjectivity and world. What Merleau-Ponty comes to call "the flesh of the world,"^{xxi} Traherne has already described as "An universe enclos'd in skin."^{xxii} Playing on the homonyms *holly* and *wholly*, Traherne avers "That all my mind was wholly everywhere, / Whate'er it saw, 'twas ever wholly there."^{xxiii} A few hundred years later, Merleau-Ponty initiates a kind of corollary assertion. He writes, "existence can have no external or contingent attribute. It cannot be anything—spatial, sexual, temporal—without being so in its entirety, without taking up and carrying forward its 'attributes' and making them into so many dimensions of its being, with the result that an analysis of any one of them that is at all searching really touches upon subjectivity itself."^{xxiv}

For Traherne, of course, primal vision, what he calls "primitive and innocent clarity,"^{xxv} reveals the glory of God. Although Merleau-Ponty concludes that "the subjectivity that we have run up against does not admit of being called God,"^{xxvi} his own notably poetic and sometimes overtly religious language—for instance, he speaks of a *communion* of perception with the perceived and a primary *faith* that binds us to the world—draws his work ever closer to Thomas Traherne's.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of “The Desolateness of Absence” is its focus on the social fabric. The subject’s desolation is measured primarily in terms of his relations to other men and women. He is poor because no one else seeks his love. No one else values his wit, his wisdom, his tears, his fury, his worth or riches. No one else’s eye prizes, exalts, rejoices in, or magnifies him. His soul has been cut loose from the bonds that would connect it to other human souls. Indeed, he has a subjectivity, but no intersubjectivity. Unrelated, he stands apart.

Yet the rhymed couplets insist upon relationship, the union of words. If the man’s powers “Are solitary,” the poem’s power to make pairs is not. Bandyng sounds back and forth, the rhymes instantiate an attunement, flashes of recognition and affiliation. Even the man’s desolation is structured in terms of relationship. Each of his attributes is matched with its eclipse. The wash of negatives all modify qualities that *do* exist. The man *has* a goodness (even if he can’t communicate it). He *has* riches, worth, great ambition, and a wide and great capacity, even if they are frustrated or neglected. His defining characteristics are not essential but stand in relation to what they might otherwise be.

Both the interactive *structure* of the poem, its polarities and rhymes, and the *content*, its descriptive failures of a man set apart from others, would imply that identity must be relational, developing out of a collaborative involvement with others, world, and God. In the parlance of contemporary phenomenologists, such a position is *intersubjective*. Traherne’s desolate man refuses to recognize the structure that binds him to others and to the world itself. As a solitary individual, he is impoverished, isolated from relation-

ships that give rise to meaning, value, and selfhood. He has become, finally, unrecognizable. If Traherne again seems to have anticipated a phenomenological stance, the ongoing reciprocity called intersubjectivity, he finds precedence in the Bible where Paul preaches to the Romans that we are “members of one another.”

Paul Ricoeur, whose philosophical thought develops out of phenomenological inquiry, elaborates upon that membership extensively. He notes that “the world has no meaning before the constitution of a common nature.”^{xxvii} It is the other, he writes, who “helps me to gather myself together, strengthen myself, and maintain myself in my identity.”^{xxviii} In the prose passage prior to “The Desolateness of Absence,” Traherne declares that “A man is not desolate when his body is alone, but when his mind is so too.” It is because of his solipsism that the desolate man finds “his *powers* / Are solitary” and his “great *capacity* is laid / *Aside*.” Using words very similar to Traherne’s, Ricoeur observes that “It is in connection with the notions of *capacity* and realization—that is, finally of *power* and act—that a place is made for *lack* and, through the mediation of lack, for others.”^{xxix} Toward the end of his investigations in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur draws a conclusion that finds its ideological rhyme in Traherne’s poem. Otherness, he recapitulates, is necessarily “enjoined in the structure of selfhood.”^{xxx} We find our riches, in other words, when we learn to “be / A bliss to others. . . .”

INTENTIONALITY

The great leap into phenomenology comes (through Brentano) with Husserl’s insight that consciousness is always conscious of something; it is object directed. Our relationship with objects is not something inserted

between consciousness and the objects. That relationship is consciousness itself. Traherne, once again, seems to have prepared the way. In a subsection from "Spiritual Absence," Traherne boldly assures his readers that "Spiritual absence. . . is an absence of our thoughts from any object whatsoever."^{xxx} He develops this idea further, claiming that "All objects are sacred treasures, freely given us of God, who loving us infinitely, delighteth that we should be happy. Willingly therefore to be absent from them, implieth the greatest guilt of which nature is capable: ingratitude. . . . For nothing is more natural, than the union of faculties, which God hath designed to be joined, to their objects."^{xxxi} Traherne's understanding extends, of course, from his assumption that God is the constant and default object of man's eye and that every worldly object is revelatory, but his very intuition of intentionality uncannily foreshadows the phenomenologists.

TIME

Uncanny too are the affinities between Traherne's mystical and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological senses of time. Merleau-Ponty is tapping Henri Bergson's thought, but Traherne is tapping his own ecstatic vision. The soul, Traherne explains, "for being transcendent to time and place is measured by neither."^{xxxii} In another section of *COMMENTARIES of Heaven*, he asserts that all time exists in the present. The soul, he writes, can experience every historical and biblical moment "as if all these were this moment in acting."^{xxxiii} Merleau-Ponty says virtually the same thing. "What is past or future for me is present in the world," he writes. And "Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present."^{xxxiv} Is it Merleau-Ponty or Traherne who declares "Objective presence is real presence and the best imaginable"?^{xxxv} That's Traherne. And which of them,

do you suppose, writes, “Everything, therefore, causes me to revert to the field of presence as the primary experience in which time and its dimensions make their appearance unalloyed, with no intervening distance and with absolute self-evidence”?^{xxxvii}

END TIME

Here, where Traherne demolishes time and his work pops out of its century just in time to be plucked from a burning heap of rubbish; here where we find it has something to offer to a 20th and 21st century philosophical dialogue; here in the clear mirror that he holds to the light of glory, it is time to pause and consider how Traherne’s real presence, timeless in the lyric miracle of his writing, can be, sometimes, in our time, the best presence imaginable. Nor has he stopped writing his way beyond us and into a future that, though it measures nothing, will no doubt find a place for him.

NOTES

- i. Thomas Traherne, in *COMMENTARIES of Heaven*, "Instructions" under subtitle, "Absence" (British Museum).
- ii. Emmanuel Levinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other: Entre Nous*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 57.
- iii. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 113.
- iv. Thomas Traherne, "Sight," in *Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. Alan Bradford (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 132.
- v. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 65.
- vi. *Ibid.*, 67.
- vii. *Ibid.*, 56.
- viii. Levinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other*, 68.
- ix. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1962), 61.
- x. Traherne, *Selected Poems and Prose*, "Centuries of Meditations 3.5," 228.
- xi. Traherne, "Third Century, I," in *Selected Poems and Prose*, 226.
- xii. Traherne, "Eden," in *Ibid.*, 7.
- xiii. Traherne, "Dumbness," in *Ibid.*, 21.
- xiv. Traherne, "Eden," in *Ibid.*, 7.
- xv. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 255.
- xvi. *Ibid.*, xxi.
- xvii. Husserl's premise is that it is necessary to bracket off the world in order to study its effects.
- xviii. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, xii.
- xix. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 17.
- xx. Traherne, "Silence," in *Selected Poems and Prose*, 25.

- xxi. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 146.
- xxii. Traherne, "Fullness," in *Selected Poems and Prose*, 29.
- xxiii. Traherne, "My Spirit," in *Ibid.*, 27.
- xxiv. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 410.
- xxv. Traherne, "Centuries 3.7," in *Selected Poems and Prose*, 229.
- xxvi. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 410.
- xxvii. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Barney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 332.
- xxviii. *Ibid.*, 332.
- xxix. *Ibid.*, 182.
- xxx. *Ibid.*, 354.
- xxxi. Traherne, "Its Nature" under heading "Spiritual Absence," in *COMMENTARIES of Heaven*.
- xxxii. Traherne, "The Evil of it" under heading "Spiritual Absence," in *Ibid.*
- xxxiii. Traherne, "A Conviction" under heading "Spiritual Absence," in *Ibid.*
- xxxiv. Traherne, "Its Objects in Particular" under heading "Agents," in *Ibid.*
- xxxv. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 412.
- xxxvi. Traherne, "A Conviction" under heading "Spiritual Absence," in *COMMENTARIES of Heaven*.
- xxxvii. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 416.

This essay is written with Charles O. Hartman, Donald Revell, Peter O'Leary, Susan Stewart, and Martin Corless-Smith in heart and mind.

INTERVIEW WITH BRENDA SHAUGHNESSY

Brenda Shaughnessy was born in 1970 in Okinawa, Japan, and grew up in Southern California. She received her B.A. in literature and women's studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and earned an M.F.A. at Columbia University's Writing Division. She is the author of *Interior with Sudden Joy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), which was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award and the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award. Her other honors include an Emerging Artist's award from the Greenwall Foundation and NYU's Institute for Advanced Study, a Creative Artist's Fellowship from the Japan/U.S. Friendship Commission, and a Bunting Fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She currently lives in Brooklyn. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper in March 2004.

Tell me about working at a tugboat company—how did you get that job?

Well, like you get anything in New York, half-randomly—a friend of mine knows someone who owns a tugboat company. My friends always ask me, “What do you wear?” My friend Mike thought I work in a windswept little shack at the end of a rickety pier, but I don’t—I work in a regular office.

With a view of the tugboats?

Um-hmm. The tugboat place is a whole different world with a whole different vocabulary. It's not just business vocabulary, it's about how the boats work, how you float your boat. It's like learning a foreign language. The tugboat is a perfect metaphor: this tiny little mighty ship pulling this massive behemoth. David and Goliath, we always love that idea. It's us against the world, the human against the machine. In this case it's a human inside

against a bigger machine against the big, bad sea. I'm lucky to be involved with it. Of course, that's the tip of the iceberg—pun intended—for what a tugboat is. I thought it was boring at first, writing tug specs and so on. I was a little bit annoyed that I had to do it. But I realized a year into the job that it was a real education. And so my next manuscript is called *Fathometer*.

What's that?

A fathometer measures the depth of the water by sound: it throws a sound down to the ocean floor and measures depth by how long the echo takes to come back up.

You've been teaching at the same time, at Lehman College. How has that been?

That's like a new language, too. I love working in the Bronx, I love the students. They are very hungry for what poetry gives: the possibility to make something of your own, to make your own voice have weight. They really want their words to count, and that's a beautiful, life-changing desire. I can't imagine better work.

What attracts them to poetry?

Most of my students are attracted to poetry because they think it's a way to get famous. If you say the right thing in the right way, everyone's going to remember it and say it all the time, and it will be part of culture. That's how they get into poetry, which is brilliant. It's also an illusion, but who cares! They can start writing poetry and then realize, "Oh, God! I need to figure out what it is I want to say." And then realize what they have already said is not really good enough. And so they learn how to speak in the most powerful and effective way they can, which makes their lives better in any case.

And of course they will never get famous as poets—poets don't even have agents.

Thank God! If you had an agent taking 10 percent of what you make on poetry, you wouldn't be able to pay your rent even for a single month. I think it's fascinating to see how every few years someone tries to convince us that suddenly poetry matters more—like after 9/11, and after we elect a Republican president, and when the economy tanks. It's just these endless excuses to say poetry is still relevant. And no one fully believes it. It still amazes me that you cannot make a living writing poetry, yet M.F.A. programs are filled to capacity with talented dreamers who still want to dream it. And where are they getting that desire? It's not just the tradition—not just “I want to be Elizabeth Bishop” or “I want to be a Robert Frost.” It's that every generation is still attracted to the possibility of making something real, of breaking through whatever it is we have to do in our daily lives just to stay alive, to get to this other place where we can actually still dream and it means something. It's anticapitalism, it's antimaterialism, it's momentary—right now I'm looking out my window at a tugboat on the river pulling a massive barge filled with containers.

Really?

Each of the containers is what you see on a big, huge truck. And I can see probably about twenty of them.

Is it one of your tugboats?

I don't know. It might be. So even though I'm at home and not working and it's Saturday, I still have to deal with the tugboat—it's right in front of me.

What made you turn to poetry?

I've always lived in my imagination. I was interested in poetry because it

seemed shorter, and easier to write, than prose. Another illusion. I also liked that you could pack multiple meanings into something as small as a line. The nonlinearity of it seemed very freeing. I wasn't going to have to organize my imagination in terms of the standard essay format, but let something else more organic organize what I wanted to say—*organic* meaning according to your heart (that's a lot of organs). That's what was attractive to me. I've always liked associative poets, like E.E. Cummings. But if I say that people may stop reading this interview. No one seems to like Cummings anymore. Cummings is goings.

Was he the first poet you came across?

No. I came across many poets all at the same time, and I didn't fall in love with any one poet. I fell in love with the possibility of being able to say three things in one sentence. And I had a really good teacher in high school who loved poetry and who encouraged me, and necessarily I fell in love with him too. The moment you get your first sense of "I can do this, I want to write poetry," you have to fall in love with the person who gave you that idea. Because you need some material: you're seventeen years old—

And there it is: love.

Yeah, it's all wrapped up in love, with a big horrible bow. The moment I got serious about poetry was the moment I fell out of love with this teacher. Suddenly I looked at him and I was like, Hmm, I think I can do better than that. Adolescent arrogance. Or destroying the father, which is necessary. In college I was around a lot of artists and creative types. Everyone had the same idea that art was the most important thing. So I just continued with it. I just always wrote. It was all love poetry, and all the people that I met ended up getting in my poems. Recently, I got a message on Friendster from one of those people that I wrote a little college love poem to. He'd found his poem in his basement. And after all this time, he thanked me for it.

For him to thank me, that's amazing. Poetry isn't just what's in a literary journal—you come up with it when you're writing a birthday card to someone that you really love.

You wrote in an article for the Poetry Society of America's Crossroads magazine that the trick is for the poet not to actually believe for too long that she is writing to or about a real person. Can you talk more about the nature of that somebody you write to—is he or she ever real?

Well, “real,” what a word. Okay, yeah, but that somebody is also the somebody inside myself. I create a miniature version of that person just for my own brain, to live in there. Then I have arguments and love affairs with them. It's like a split-personality onanism. Or a boomeranging projection. They say never tell a novelist what you did last night—especially if it's really good, or embarrassing!—because they're going to use it. And in poetry there's the idea you can take a feeling you get from someone, or the idea of somebody, if you feel like that idea is love, and internalize it and then use it. This is a cynical way of looking at love and poetry, but there are many different loves in my book. And the next manuscript is that way too. I was looking at it and saying to myself, Oh Jesus, am I going to do this forever? Am I going to just parade the last five years of my life romantically and sexually through my poems? Is that what I'm doomed to do?

Are your poems only fueled by love gone bad? Or desire for a perfect love?

Something in between, I hope, and this is always the question: can you write good poetry when you're happy? When you have the love of your life in your bed with you forever? I believe there's always something to long for, because you never really have another person. You don't even have yourself. As I get more mature as a human being, I believe I'm not on an endless search for random people who might eventually make it into a poem. It's about deepening that search and acknowledging that the search is reflective of a

constant dissatisfaction with what is. My poems are about adventure and what happens when you are open, and what happens is that you hurt, and the emptiness means you have more longing, and through the longing you're regenerated and you have more love to throw out there, and more love gets thrown at you, and the whole love circulation just keeps happening. It's an incredible shock every time. There's the bleeding and oxidizing when you rip out your heart and a kind of fresh blood supply when you absorb another's love. The love dyad is a microcosm, of course—and the only way I know how to get at the macro at this point.

The poems find their charge in address as well as through diction, which leads me to the next question: How do you feel about ornate language, and what is its place in your poems?

Well, I think my relationship to that ornateness has changed over the years, but there are two points I want to make. First, ornateness has to do with this element of masquerade. Second, and related to the first, it gives a kind of guest pass to the sublime. Instead of the way we might euphemize something harsh in conversation, poems can go over the top in speaking the harsh truth in the most extreme way, so the narrator can overdo it, and the author doesn't have to be such a bitch.

Just to play devil's advocate: Why do that?

One reason is because you can't ever really say what you are saying. That's a silly answer, but it's partly true. The translation from inner reality to an external order can be gruesome. You flay yourself open when you're writing the poems, and when you realize that they might be seen by other people, you realize how much you're going to expose of yourself. So then after you've exposed yourself several times you realize it's not a pleasant feeling. And so that becomes a part of your process. You learn how to conceal yourself, but it's like wearing a transparent outfit. The transparent fabric being such a glorious beautiful fabric that what people notice is how beautiful the fabric is, even though you can see right through it.

When I first read Interior with Sudden Joy I was dazzled by its diction, but the more I read those poems the more I thought beyond or behind the diction. I felt the artifice of that diction serves to allow for an even greater intimacy when you turn to plain, direct speech.

Well, the poetical play is not a ruse to distract people from what's really happening. It's another way of saying the plainspoken stuff. It's a translation of that. To stick with the metaphor of wearing the transparent clothes, the fabric of the transparent clothes would be printed with all of your blood vessels. Right? So it's not real nakedness, but a kind of gory display of what's beneath the skin. That's what we have with language. No matter how pretty it sounds, no matter how well we craft what we want to say to the world, no one can really see the mechanism of our minds. It's not write-able, it's not readable—so we have to come at it in terms of layers.

In "Voluptuary" the narrator says:

*Who wants pretty when pretty is plain
and the heart is gnarled
and the full sacked forest
of being lost is home. Forest where we love
the beast surprising.*

Yeah, we need that, don't we?

The point is that the way we are trained to speak of beauty is insufficient and uninteresting. It's not generative.

Right. Well, I guess I don't have much to speak of beyond the years that I've been alive, but it seems to me like beauty has turned into the concept of perfection, or youth, or something that's much more computer-generated. And I just cannot accept that definition of beauty. That poem is about truth being beauty, about the reality of what it is to be a human being as

beautiful. That's another theme in my poems: perfection is not the goal. If you imagine perfection or the merely pretty as being some kind of apex of human experience, you're not ever going to be surprised.

I wanted to ask you about California and New York, since you spent the first half of your life in the former, then moved to the latter. What do both places mean to you?

Both are double places to me. I grew up in a middle-class, homogeneous, incredibly boring suburb of Los Angeles. And I had a happy childhood—it's just that the only thing to do was go to the mall, which created in me a hunger for the bigger world. My other California was Santa Cruz, where I went to college. Northern and Southern California still have that eternal divide, and everyone has the endless argument of "which is better," but college was the first time I got a sense of meeting people who were very, very different from myself. And that it was necessary to make the move to New York.

How did that move happen?

I fell in love with a girl, and she was going to NYU for graduate school—so I just followed her. I had never been to New York. I had my suitcase, and my grandfather had just given me a thousand dollars. And I thought, This is going to be great, I'm rich and I'm moving to New York. A thousand dollars! I couldn't believe it. And when I got here I realized I wasn't rich at all. It had never occurred to me that I could actually use up all that money.

A thousand dollars didn't get you very far.

No, it didn't—I practically starved to death. Years later I realized how crazy a move it was, and I know that I would not have done it had I not been completely green, and a total, love-blind idiot. New York is split into two different realities for me, too: that first was all about having nothing, knowing nobody, and my lover leaving me shortly after I arrived.

So you were totally on your own?

I had a few friends and my crap job at Kinko's, but other than that I was completely broke, lost, and devastated. That version of New York, and my desperation then, figures greatly in my first book. The other New York I've found is where things happen, where you make poetry and get into a groove, and you meet people and they help you out, and you help people out, and you build something for yourself, you build a community. You look out for each other as well—if everyone around you is a starving artist, you have potlucks. You have something for yourself, and you're not just this isolated person floating around in madness.

How long did it take until the first New York turned into the second?

A few years. I got into graduate school the year after I moved. I was intimidated by how smart and entitled I thought the other students were going to be, and I had a real chip on my shoulder. Because I didn't know anything else. I was a just a kid from public school. But having people take me seriously as a poet, even though I was just a student, really changed my relationship to New York.

Did that happen from the get-go at Columbia?

Yes, among my peers and teachers. They were really anchors—they made me feel like I had a reason to take myself seriously, a reason to be in New York, and a reason to continue with my dreams. Lynn Melnick, who started at Columbia with me, was very important. She single-handedly gave me the sense that I had family here, that I had a poetic sister. Lucie Brock-Broido helped a lot, too. She really takes in all these poets and gives them a sense they can be in this place with a makeshift little family of peers, and be free to make work. She was really such a giving teacher. Mark Doty and Richard Howard were important teachers—Mark so dreamy and incisive and kind,

and Richard so intimidating and mesmerizing. And Alice Quinn so dashing. What else can I say about poetry school? It was dramatic and drunk, passionate and expensive. The department would sometimes throw these “free” pizza and wine parties, and we would joke about the \$500 slice and \$200 paper cup of wine. Any M.F.A. student has had, I’m sure, the exact same set of jokes.

Did you work while in graduate school?

I had to stay at Kinko’s for a while. Then I got an internship at the Academy of American Poets. That’s where I got to see the New York poetry world, outside of school. I loved it there—I couldn’t believe I got to be behind the scenes. It became another kind of home. But I also felt intimidated, because occasionally I would be in the position of having to figure out the salad fork versus whatever. I had no idea. While there I came across a book of Dorothea Tanning’s retrospective work, and I was totally amazed. I wrote her a love letter/fan letter, and we became friends and started hanging out—doing things that were so glamorous to me, like drinking champagne. I was in love with her paintings, I was in love with her. I just thought she was the most beautiful, brilliant human being I had ever met in my life—and she’s still that. Of course she was kind enough to let me use her title and her painting on my book cover.

Can you talk about your fellowship from the Japan/U.S. Friendship Commission—what was it like to live in Japan for nine months?

It was going back to that place where you have to be alone with nothing—just yourself. For some reason I found myself in that position for a couple of years. The Radcliffe fellowship year in Cambridge was like that. I found myself going someplace new without any emotional safety nets. In Cambridge I fell in with a whole group of other people to talk about poetry with, and we were all poets together. Japan was very different because

there aren't any poets, really: the concept of a contemporary poet making relevant work that matters, at least to a literary audience, doesn't seem to exist there. Poetry in Japan is really an ancient art, like textiles or calligraphy. I mean, people will sit down and write haiku as a meditative exercise, but that's about it. The slam stuff from the States has actually taken hold a little bit there, and there are some poetry open mic readings. I did go to a couple. But in Japan I wasn't a poet—I was a foreigner. By wandering around endlessly and being amazed at Tokyo, what I got in touch with was a deep sense of stupidity. I didn't have words, you know—my one defense has always been that I can explain myself. And I didn't have that at all—I couldn't explain anything. The best I could do was point to something on a menu. That was really hard, and I loved it, I just loved it. I was miserable through a lot of it, but on a deeper level I knew it was awesome. And of course, when you're that open to your own stupidity, you will fall in love—so I did that, too.

Did that experience have an effect on your poems?

Yes. A lot of writing in general is necessarily dependent on assumptions—for instance, that the reader understands some basic ideas about how poetry works, or how the English language works. I now find my poems are a lot more explanatory—like, I say a word and then tell you what I mean by that word, because I can't assume you're going to know what I mean. It's a lot more self-questioning; I guess it comes down to not being able to take meaning for granted. I mean, if I'm going to use the word “fathometer” in an ordinary sentence, I can't expect you to look it up. I have to tell you what it is—though I don't have to do it in a boring way. There is an ESL factor to my writing that I am newly aware of.

Your new poems use less ornate diction than the poems in Interior with Sudden Joy.

I love beautiful words, but I've come to mistrust them.

What do you trust?

I guess I trust the beauty of a true statement, and a true statement doesn't have to be direct or linear. But it can't fake you out or mislead you and still claim it's true. My educational training taught me to mistrust the concept of truth, and I still believe that truth doesn't exist in a vacuum—there's nothing objective about it. Avoiding what's true for you can make you come up with all kinds of creative compensations. But I want to believe what I write, and I'm a little nervous about stripping away the texture of the beautiful words. I'm worried about it, but I have to grow out of it, too. And I'll come back around to it.

Right. There's still exploration in language—it's just a matter of what propels the poem.

I think a really extraordinary word—a word that's archaic, or just so beautiful that all you can feel is how beautiful it is—has less elasticity than a word that has more associations but looks more ordinary.

Do you think poets must swear off their formal inventions to write new poems?

Well, yeah—everyone says that writing a second book is really hard, for obvious reasons. I think it's partly because (and this is an idea put out to me by the musician Michael Attias) in the first book you're trying new things, and you don't know if they're going to work. You're just going on your gut, working off of everything you believe in, and then you try something new, and boom!—it works, it's something. You didn't know it would be. But the danger is in repetition: you know it works, so you keep doing it. And you lose track of that feeling of making something without knowing what you're doing. The poems stop being about your voice—they become their own voice. And there's no such thing as more of the same. It has to be more of you, and you can't be the same as you were then. That's partly why I find Dorothea so inspiring: throughout her entire painting career—sixty

years—she never stuck to one style. She keeps getting pegged as a surrealist, but in fact her arc of work has always moved beyond any category. But people latch onto that one famous period. There's no adequate name for what she did then, and no movement for what she did after, but that decade of her work was just one of many in the evolution of a brilliant artist. I really believe that in times to come people will come to see that evolution as a model.

By contrast, there are some poets who seem to spend an entire career trying to write one poem.

But that's the same thing—working on the same poem for your whole life is that movement. It's not repeating yourself. I don't know. I cannot claim to know that what I'm doing is the right thing. I'm deeply insecure about my new work. On the other hand, I have to write what feels true to me, what feels right to me. I am ambivalent with the obsessive sexualizing of my love drive. I think there's more to the love drive than that.

I'd like to ask you about your relationship to feminism—specifically in relation to part of your poem “Parallax”:

*Excluding genitalia,
What is a man?
A little boy, all grown. A reverse Neverland.*

*What is a woman?
Easier. She is a cipher, she hasn't been
decided yet. Also she's a queen.*

I was struggling with the twin concepts of difference and identity, that there is this supposed biological “free space” that probably only exists in fantasy, but which changes into gender roles the moment a person enters culture. Then acclimatized humans look back and try to figure out how they

became men and women, respectively. It seemed to me that a man might say “I was Peter Pan, until this peter came into play.” And a woman might say, “I’ve never been anything but I always could have been on top of it all, had I not always been nothing.” Feminism is not just an -ism to me—it’s a reality. I’m always coming from the position that women are full human beings but are constantly placed in different categories from men. You’re never going to escape your gender. So we have this rhetoric of equality, and we also have this “separate but equal” bullshit we have to deal with. I don’t know—it’s a struggle. There’s a kind of feminism that I had before, which was very defensive. A sort of lesbian feminism that was more about opposition to heterosexual norms, opposition to being pegged as a woman. Wanting to escape my gender. At the same time I was always aware that I couldn’t escape, and there were certain powers in being a woman that could be wonderful to employ.

Like what?

Like a female physicality. For me, feminism is partly about taking joy in feminine sexuality, whether that be queer or straight. Being a sexual woman is an awesome thing. And part of my deep feminism is believing that all women need to experience that happiness in whatever way they do, in contrast and in resistance to the virgin/whore construction. My feminism is partly about debunking that dichotomy. The place for a woman to be sexually free is a place that she’s got to find in herself—it’s not something society is ever going to give her. So that’s the heart of my debate, I think. I don’t go into equality in the workplace. I’m concerned about interior structures of sexuality that allow us to either be ourselves or not.

What happened to change your defensive position on feminism?

I fell in love with a man. And I realized, Oh my God, there’s this whole other half of the world I never understood. I was scared of understanding,

and I didn't know if I could trust the attempt since I could never understand a male being from firsthand experience. But, the whole other side of human sexuality—it's fascinating. One thing I underestimated: I thought that women had a lock on all the sexual complexes. And then I realized men have those too. Apparently I am very slow. Men have all this pressure, and women have all this pressure, but they're very different pressings. I never recognized that before, and I'm fascinated by it. So understanding more about male sexuality is next on the agenda.

Did you grow up religious?

No. Not really. I'm not anti-religion—I just don't have a specific one. I like a lot of them, as different translations of the same phenomenon.

Which religions appeal to you?

Well, I'm a little rabid about Gnosticism, these days, but it's complicated to get into. I have to skirt around the edges of anything suggesting Gnosis, so let's just say that Gnostics are gnarly. I get chills reading about them or thinking about them and feel a deep sadness about and wonder for them. I am attached to the Buddhist idea of everything being nothing, and a lot of my new poems are about that constant inversion. You've got your macro and your micro, and the impossibility of possession. I think it's a really archetypal idea—I don't even think it belongs to Buddhism, but to anyone who wants it.

Which in itself seems like a Buddhist notion.

Yes. The idea of Buddhism is so hard to talk about, because it just makes you spin. There's nothing to hold onto. The big issue that I can't fathom in Buddhism is this idea of having no desire. I don't understand that. I'm stuck in wanting, and stuck in wanting to want. I don't get how you can just let

things come and go, without tremendous pain, especially if those things are people and ideas and hopes. I'm a human being, and I still try to hold onto my little trinkets—that's why I still love having these little jewelry boxes full of words. But as far as religion and spirituality go, I just believe that you have this path and you can follow it at the same time that you are creating it, whacking the bushes in your way. Even if the compass keeps spinning the way it does. If you're a poet, I suppose it's easy to say you can't get distracted by materialism, or status, or success—which is ego, and a much smaller version of a self. But how can even a poet—especially a poet—let go of wanting? All you have is your heart, which is designed divinely to want, right? And the reason you have that is to give it away. That must be why I write love poems: so I can keep my heart even as I give it away.

THREE SORRIES

Brenda Shaughnessy

1) I'M SORRY

I hid your life vest in the deathtrap on purpose, my love.
I'd hoped you'd die, and in this way, live. Sorry.

Three snakes asked me three questions each,
each requiring three answers.

My answers, thrice tripled,
looped back around to the natural sounds

of just forgetting, of the tenderly adjusted.

Soon 1)	Born: 1970
2)	Cried: all along
3)	Loved: you really so very much and no others

blurred into:	1)	begging off for the dog-years behavior
	2)	extra heart hidden in sock drawer
	3)	undetected slept with others

It's not as if, it wasn't because, I didn't mean
it three to the thirtieth power and replacement.

All seemed collapsible into one sentence,
which I hope you can read into: I'm sorry.

2) DON'T BE SORRY

Keep doing it!
Make the red lead ball float on the black
snow of a small man's monstrous land.

The details distract me from the basic landscape.
Lurid with everyone young,
all singing toward a patch of backbends

and no pain, your lavender plane aims
for a wet landing
between two pointed green breasts.

And, drunk, just makes it.
Will do it again this way, calm as a skunk
on the road, smelling cars and so certain

that cars smell her. But they don't.
Throw your body over the many-storied ledge
again, to prove you can't undo it.
And further, wouldn't. Won't.

3) HOW CAN I NOT BE?

You make me sound so bad. At our miserable dinner,
even my own chewing disgusted me, as if I'd borrowed
myself from you, with a weak smile. *I promise I'll give it back.*

Stories with no sex, no terse, conspicuous absence
of sex and no characters you can project sex onto
never get picked out to read in bed

nervous about, but hoping, for sex.
You're a big, crazy skeleton with black, mean hair
and the same eyes. Same stalky hands fluid as always

carving into the same groove so as to seem endless
but there's no surprise, just that pinch of you moving
like mercury to look as unfathomable as time or trash.

Tell me a new story, one you don't know the middle of.
There's only so much I can take, that's the mistake.
And I take it back, I'm not sorry. Not sorry at all.

DRIFT

I'll go anywhere to leave you but come with me.
All the cities are like you anyway. Windows
darken when I get close enough to see.
Anyplace we want to stay's polluted,

the good spots taken already by those
who ruin them. And restaurants we'd never find.
We'd rut a ditch by a river in nights
so long they must be cut by the many pairs

of wrong-handled scissors maybe god owns
and doesn't share. I water god.
I make a haunted lake and rinse and rinse.
I take what I want, and have ever since what

I want disappeared, like anything hunted.
That's what you said. Disappointment
isn't tender, but dried and wide instead.
The tourists snapped you crying,

and the blanket I brought was so dirty
it must have been lying around
in lice and blood that whole year we fought.
It wasn't clear, so I forgot.

I haven't been sleeping next to you,
twitching to bury my boring eyes.
The ship made you sad, and the ferry, and canoe.
All boats do.

THESE ARE ME AND I'VE BECOME MY OWN FRIEND

Rodica Draghinescu

Should I do introductions?
this is the railroad
these the arms these the legs
this is the see-through dress
excited to make its getaway from the body
ALSO I HAD
a newly furnished head
I set it ASIDE
to bring it to its senses
I turned it over
to see its GREEN pinky-pink buttocks
also I had
a bouquet of fine features
two PER MUSCLE
in the style of the woman who sells absorbent cotton and tampons
maybe I also should have something
clear favorite conclusive
(like a shoulder with a *grain de beauté*
that immediately could realize if it were lied to
about spring's arrival wafting Parisian perfumes)
these are FINGERS
(which my mother always counted
until I began to tell her MAMA
THERE ARE 10 OF THEM AND THEY STILL OBEY ME

now they glissando because
they've grown up
and need to move mysteriously
otherwise going to
other fingers' parties seems pointless)
THIS IS SHAME
a silken arithmetic
so young it doesn't really get it
I let it play upon my body and it
pushed in close
happy and not really used to
such sophisticated names
WHO asked it WHY
this is the train
a sort OF drawer
where I keep all manner of bodies
to put it bluntly
these are me and
I've become my own friend

—translated from the Romanian by Adam J. Sorkin and Antuza Genescu

THE CLOUD

Geoffrey Nutter

An eyeball-shaped cloud was floating
over the summer houses. You eyeballed it
serenely from the amaranth meadow. Time was
one would take up a syrinx and sing to it.
Now it passes, ghostily, mostly unnoticed
at low altitudes over an argus-eyed nation.
I bawled at the loss—its orbit on newsprint
large as the sky. I, bald as brimstone
brimming with horror. My hazel peepers
were going in a circular orbit, heaven
to earth and back again, scanning that
field between abyss and zenith. There
was, at least, the sun, eyeball-sized,
bright as a diamond hammer. Something
happened. I balled up my fists into gel-filled
orbs, put them up there—no cigar. I kneed
the earth, putting down two scratched patellae
in the dirt beside a maize-bordered pasture
—the basic looking-for-something-I lost
or asking-for-something posture.

THE PROLOGUE

The gargantuan page hovered over the valley.

It was page 5.

And page 5 hung over the castle, like sheets, like clouds,
like . . . like wings.

Wheat waved in the valley, corn billowed on the slopes,
green . . . green.

All were lying in the gentle purple shadow of the Prologue.

It was a story about waves of purple martins flying down
to eat the apple cores.

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